FEBRUARY 2019 AFRICA

PLAYBOY

TREVOR PAGLEN
PREPARES TO LAUNCH THE FIRST-EVER SPACE SCULPTURE

PEACE THROUGH ROCK
THE CITY WHERE PUNK IS A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

IMAGINE
A PROGRAM THAT COULD PREDICT YOUR FETISHES AND DESIRES

MURDER THEY RAPPED
USING AN ARTIST'S LYRICS AGAINST THEM IN A CRIMINAL TRIAL

THE INTERVIEW
WE GET CANDID WITH AUTHOR AND PHILOSOPHER SAM HARRIS

Danielle PAIGE

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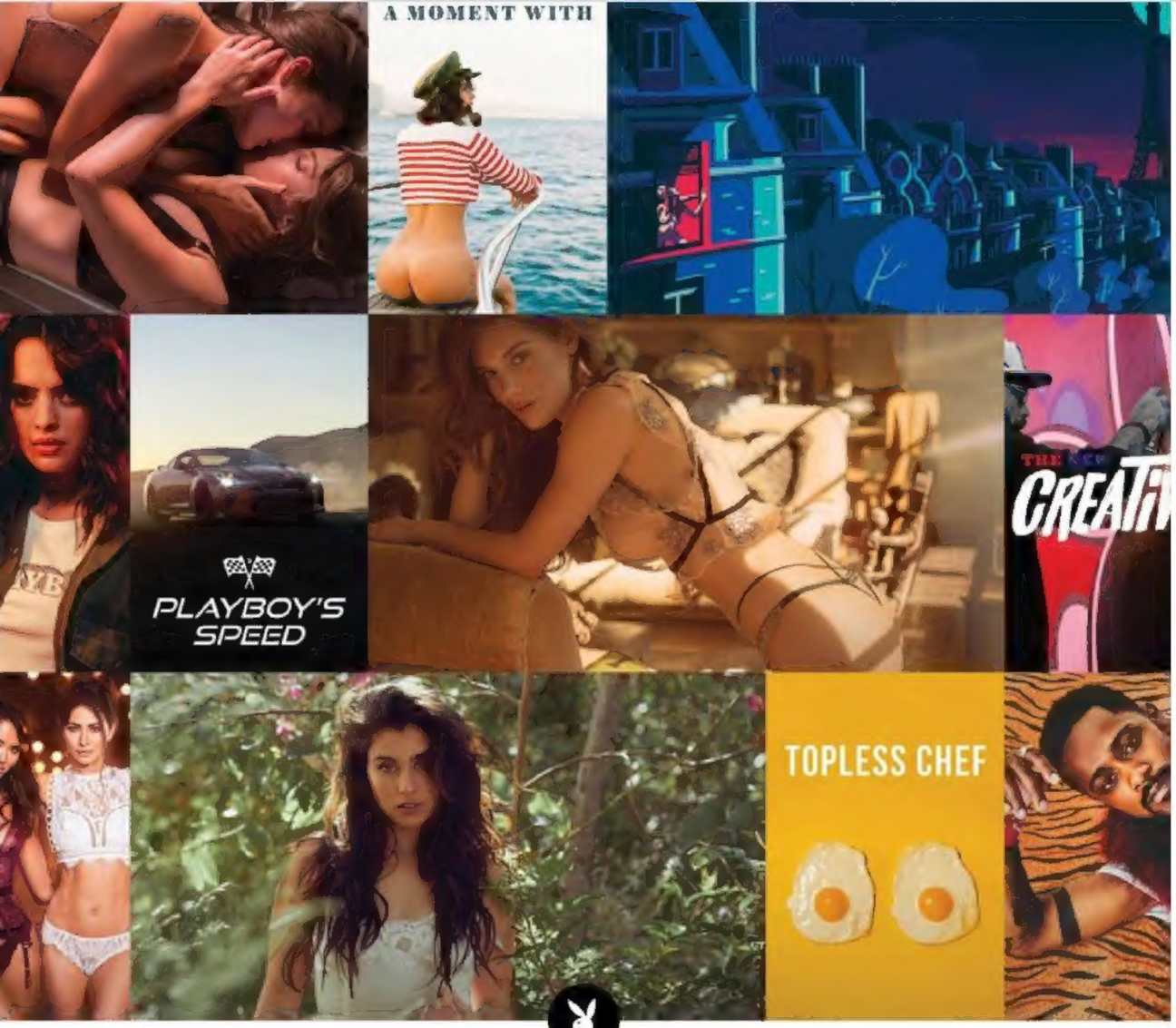

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PLAYBILL

Riki Blanco
Madrid-based illustrator Blanco drew from his own experience to craft a piece for Red Tide Rising, Adam Skolnick's essay on American socialism. He also created the art for Chuck Palahniuk's Repercussions. "Everything is party, confetti, diversity, respect, community," he says of his creative process. On addressing free speech in a challenging political climate: "My work is almost always allegorical. Fortunately for artists, ambiguity gives us some leeway."

Chuck Palahniuk
"I'm always proud to show up in the pages of PLAYBOY," says Palahniuk. Since 2000 he has contributed more than a dozen pieces, including "a feature about farm- equipment demolition derbies in the 50th anniversary issue, which shockingly seems like just last year." In his short story Repercussions, he explores how far a mother will go to protect her son. Palahniuk's latest project, the graphic novel Fight Club 3, launches as a 12-part series starting in January.

Luis Gomez
An internationally renown photographer, producer, editor, videographer and musician, whose work is published worldwide. Luis Gomez is known as a guitar player and exclusive artist signed by Gibson guitars and producer and filmmaker. Luis Gomez is the CEO of Universe 137 Studios And Chicas Universe 137 working with more than 40 magazines.

Sarah Maxwell
When reading the five Playboy Symposium essays to inspire her accompanying artwork, illustrator Maxwell (who also provided the NSFW visuals for Dirty Talk) was struck by Christopher Stroop's piece on bad-faith arguments regarding free speech and religion. "Being an openly lesbian artist, I want to create a platform for the community to be seen and normalised," the Paris-based Texas native says. "Love is something everyone can relate to, regardless of gender."

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ON THE COVER
Danielle Paige, photography by Bruce Colero
No 20 February 2019

Come out to

Play

The Playboy by Coco de Mer Collection will take you back to the time when women were first empowered to feel sensual and embrace their sexuality. The collection draws on glamorous vintage influences, each range based on an iconic Playboy issue. Sheer, delicate tulles combine with playful trims and exclusive embroideries to create flirtatious bedroom pieces. The overall feel is playfully provocative; this is lingerie made for pleasure.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **RANKIN/THE FULL SERVICE**

Coco de Mer
LONDON

Flirtatious
KISS ME

A scarlet red embroidery combined with soft red satin, inspired by the red lips on the cover of Playboy in May 1979. Asymmetric cutaways shape the body with designs that tempt, tease and empower - the perfect Valentine's gift.

Seductive
TEMPT ME

Black allover lace teams with removable black strapping and gold hardware to create a provocative collection with a bondage aesthetic.

Playful

CATCH ME

Inspired by the Playboy Bunny herself, this collection takes a feminine and playful direction. A removable faux fur pompom is attached to each style in a cute and flirtatious way - made for the Playboy Bunny in all of us!

The collection is available from www.coco-de-mer.com and ASOS, Selfridges, Net-A-Porter and all good retailers

Enchanting

TEASE ME

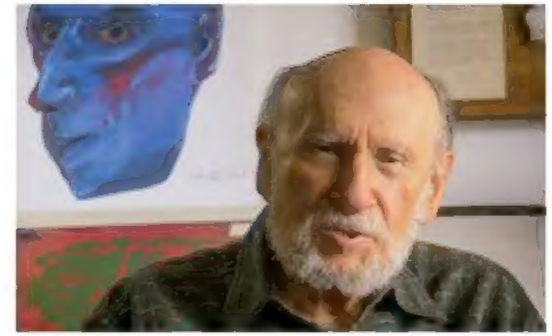
A subtle silver sparkle will catch your eye in this bespoke embroidery range. Paired with a velvety black satin, this collection is modern and seductive, perfect for the contemporary woman. Iconic Coco de Mer shapes are combined with new styles to create this shimmering collection.

BUENOS DÍAS

Our Rabbit travelled to the Vegas Strip in November for Playboy's 2018 Día de los Muertos Party at Tao Las Vegas. The celebration, which followed a slew of Playboy Halloween-related festivities across the globe — including at Playboy clubs in London and New York — was hosted by Playmates Carly Lauren, Stephanie Branton, Gia Marie, Kristy Garett, Cassandra Dawn and Shauna Sexton, who danced the night away in flower crowns and Coco de Mer lingerie, with the help of DJ Vice.

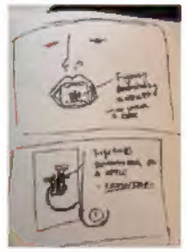
SPOOKY SPIRITS

Playboy Club London's annual Halloween bash served as the official launchpad for the Gothic Gin Garden, a six-week-long pop-up presented in association with Tanqueray. At the Bunnyhosted preview, Keyholders customised gin and tonics with accoutrements plucked from a "sprig wall" amid a fairy tale–themed "botanical gin garden."



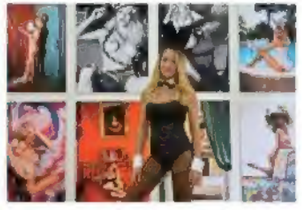
WORK OF ART

PLAYBOY's founding art director is the subject of a new documentary, *Art Paul of Playboy: The Man Behind the Bunny*, which offers a rare look at the late icon's career, including his 30-year tenure at PLAYBOY. Interweaving archival footage and conversations with artists, colleagues, Hugh Hefner and Paul himself, the film, per director Jennifer Hou Kwong, "presents a serious and creative part of PLAYBOY in a positive light that has never been done before." Not long after the doc's premiere at the Chicago Film Festival, Chicago gallery One After 909 debuted RaceFace, an exhibition of imagined faces based on Paul's observations about race and prejudice from his perspective as a Jewish man.



UNCOVERED

To bring to life the theme of our 65th anniversary issue — is freedom of expression absolute in our country? — we tapped 27-year-old internet sensation and art director Marius Sperlich. This marks the first time in 19 years that PLAYBOY has commissioned a visual artist for our cover, and we couldn't be more pleased with the result: Sperlich's macrophotography imbues an undoubtedly American cultural moment with the ironies and injustices surrounding free expression and censorship in the United States. Phases of Sperlich's creative process appear above. "Change is in the air as a new generation of ideas takes hold," he says. "Demonstrations are the embodiment of unity — people banding together from all walks of life for a cause. The censored nipple functions as the poster child for a much broader problem of social injustice, and our protestors want to know: Is this really the land of the free?"



WITH LOVE FROM ITALY

One year after Hugh Hefner's death, we paused to celebrate our founder's life in true Playboy style. On September 27 in Milan, *Playboy Italy* Playmate Giulia Borio unveiled *Caro Amico Ti Scrivo*, or "Dear f riend, I write to you," an exhibit of 27 largeformat images by photographer Carlo Mari.

COCO, DO YOU LOVE ME?

We'd like to take a moment to thank British lingerie brand Coco de Mer for styling the Playmates at our Día de los Muertos event (opposite page). In January, the brand launches its latest collaboration with us: Playboy by Coco de Mer. Each piece pays homage to a past issue of PLAYBOY. See more at coco-de-mer.com.

Trevor Paglen stands beneath Prototype for a Nonfunctional Satellite (Design 4; Build 4) — a predecessor of Orbital Reflector — at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C.

Man in His DOMAIN

TREVOR PAGLEN

With Orbital Relector, the artist has created one of the first-ever space sculptures. What it reflects might change the way you view the cosmos — and your fellow earthlings

BY **ZACH SOKOL**

"There's no such thing as a civilian space program, and there never will be," Trevor Paglen says with a resigned laugh. It's early October, and we're talking in an office at New York University's AI Now Institute, where the 44-year-old is an Artist Fellow. But lately he's been spending time in Nevada, working on one of humankind's first works of fine art to be displayed in the infinite gallery of space.

Space is having a moment, in ways Paglen finds both troubling and inspiring: Elon Musk has launched a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket equipped with a Tesla; more than 600 customers have paid upward of $200,000 each for a seat on Virgin Galactic's commercial spaceflight; President Trump has announced his so-called Space Force (designed to ensure "American dominance in space"). Just as it was in the 20th century, modern space exploration is a springboard for nationalistic myth-making. But Paglen — a 2017 MacArthur Fellow and geography Ph.D. known for "showing what invisibility looks like" by documenting classified reconnaissance satellites, National Security Agency listening stations, weapons test sites and other clandestine structures — sees space exploration through a different lens: Space is entirely a "weaponised" place as far as we earthlings are concerned, and all recent advancements in the industry are outgrowths of the Cold War.

"When we're looking at spaceflight," he says, "it has everything to do with military and other attempts to exert power over the planet from that high ground, whether that's surveillance, targeting or delivering weapons."

Take Sputnik. As much as it was a testament to human ingenuity, it was also a demonstration of the Soviet Union's ability to shuttle a nuclear weapon to the other side of the planet. The same arguably goes for SpaceX today: That intergalactic Tesla was essentially "an advertisement" aimed at the military, implicitly marketing the Falcon Heavy rocket as a cargo carrier that can lug much more than an electric car — a payload filled with surveillance satellites, for example. In fact, it was widely reported that SpaceX's Falcon 9 launched a government-owned payload into an undisclosed orbit on a January 2018 trip.

"The market that drives the creation of launch vehicles is a military market," Paglen says, one that "SpaceX is very actively trying to break into, and has broken into." The artist adds, "It's telling a different story than [competitor] Lockheed," but it's gunning for the same contracts.

Call it Orbital Realism: Space travel is inextricable from the military-industrial complex. So how can an artist hold up a mirror to such a vast and shadowy milieu? If you're Trevor Paglen, you do just that: You design a giant reflective sculpture, and you shoot it into space.

Paglen's extraterrestrial artwork is named Orbital Reflector. If all goes to plan, the diamond-shape, 100-foot-long inflatable object will have ripped through the night skies in low orbit for about six to eight weeks after its launch in late November. It will look just like a slow-moving star in the Big Dipper and will complete a revolution around the world about every 90 minutes. Ultimately, it will burn to nothing in Earth's atmosphere.

The project highlights the extent of the military's reach through an inherent contradiction: Orbital Reflector, built by aerospace contractor Global Western, will be sent toward the stars inside a CubeStat satellite on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket. More likely than not, the freight will also include at least one spy satellite. But the venture also serves as a nice foil to themes present throughout the artist's oeuvre: On top of depicting what invisibility and government secrecy look like, Orbital Reflector may prompt us to see the cosmos anew.

"I think it's provocative to say, 'I'm going to make something and put it in the sky and it will be visible from Earth,'" Paglen explains. "You're provoking a conversation about what the legitimate uses of space are. You're provoking a conversation about who should have the rights to do what in a space — pardon my pun — that we instinctually think of as a shared resource, which it is."

"Trevor is not advocating that artists begin shooting satellites into orbit," says David Walker, executive director and CEO of the Nevada Museum of Art, which partnered with Paglen on the project. "What he's doing is asking us to reconsider the preciousness of Earth." And of course Orbital Reflector's location gives it a simple, striking characteristic: "More people will see it and know about it than just about any artwork that's ever been created," Walker says.

Early in our conversation, Paglen tells me about Nikolai Fedorov, a 19th century Russian philosopher who wrote about space as a mystical tool that could reincarnate everyone who had ever lived. Space, he believed, would help humanity achieve something akin to the Kingdom of Heaven. The prototranshumanist would go on to influence the architects of the early Russian space program.

"That seems unthinkable," Paglen says of cosmism theories, "and to me, that's what art aspires to: not only to challenge you to think in a different way but to see in a different way."

Later, he reiterates his interest in the philosopher and the value of challenging our sense of reality through otherworldly ideas. "If you can imagine that, then maybe you can imagine having more social justice or having more equitable health care policies or what have you," Paglen says. He laughs again, with less resignation this time. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **STEPHEN VOSS**

Cheers and Jeers

What to do when an extremist group decides to gather at your local bar? Inside a cultural and constitutional quagmire

BY JASON HORN

Make Westing, a popular bar in Oakland, California, has a front patio that some patrons refer to as the city's front porch. "We have a huge crowd, and it's everything — it's black, it's white, it's old, it's young," says a representative of the bar, who asked not to be named. Imagine their surprise last summer when an assistant manager saw a Reddit post claiming that a local chapter of the Proud Boys would be meeting there.

The bar had a choice to make: Let the group in or kick them out. "We were between a rock and a hard place," the rep says. "If we said, 'Fine, come,' we'd get destroyed in a liberal city like Oakland. And if we didn't let them come, the alt-right would come after us." (Started during the 2016 presidential campaign by Vice Media co-founder Gavin McInnes, the Proud Boys reject the "alt-right" label; the group calls itself a "Western chauvinist" organisation. The Southern Poverty Law Center classifies it as a hate group.) After consulting with lawyers and other bars in the neighbourhood, Make Westing decided to "figure out what good we could possibly bring to this." They created a Facebook post disavowing racism and announcing an event of their own for the day of the planned Proud Boys meeting — one that would raise money for Black Lives Matter, the ACLU and other organisations.

The day before Make Westing's event, African American teenager Nia Wilson was murdered by a white man at an Oakland train station, and the organisers of a march scheduled for the next day decided it would end at the bar. Suddenly, Make Westing was at the centre of an upheaval: Even the mayor of Oakland tweeted a link to its original Facebook post, which reached more than 100,000 people.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MAURIZIO DI IORIO**

On the big day, the Proud Boys didn't show. Make Westing's event raised thousands of dollars for Wilson's family and various progressive causes, but the bar experienced online and voice-mail vitriol from both sides. "No matter what we did, we were wrong in a lot of people's eyes," the bar's representative says.

In this apparent civil-liberties stalemate, the staff of Make Westing is not alone. In September, a group of alleged white nationalists harassed and pepper-sprayed a Democratic Socialists of America meeting at a bar in Louisville, Kentucky. In July, six skinheads were charged with ethnic intimidation and simple assault after beating an African American man at a bar in Avalon, Pennsylvania. Later that month, Joey Gibson — a U.S. Senate candidate and the leader of Patriot Prayer, a far-right group whose marches and rallies have turned violent several times — urged followers in a Facebook Live post to contact a Vancouver, Washington bar that had kicked him out. The bar was inundated with harassment and threats.

It can happen the other way too: In Los Angeles last summer, a scuffle broke out in a bar one Saturday night after a Proud Boys gathering wasn't ejected quickly enough and opponents of the group showed up en masse. The bar closed that night and Sunday. Its owner, who was not at the bar during the incident, issued a statement: "I am ultimately to blame for not having a policy in place to deal with this sort of thing that could be implemented in my absence," he wrote. "I've just never had any experience with something like this before."

The political and business consequences of refusing to serve certain people may be complicated, but the legal consequences are not. "You have a First Amendment right to associate with some and to disassociate with others," says Matt C. Pinsker, a constitutional law expert and adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. "The general rule is private property owners can do whatever they want as long as it doesn't discriminate against a legally protected class," including those based on race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability and a few other categories — but definitely not including political views. (Sexual orientation is a protected class in some states but not federally; see the Supreme Court's 2018 Masterpiece Cakeshop decision.) Technically, then, business owners and staff "can discriminate against other groups," Pinsker says. "If you have something you find morally appalling, you have the right to exclude them from your bar. Some people might find fans of the wrong football team morally appalling, and others might find neo-Nazis morally appalling."

Even on a small scale, the decision to kick someone out for their beliefs is fraught. San Diego bartender Ashley Wardle learned this firsthand when she eighty-sixed a customer wearing a Proud Boys shirt last summer. "I was the person in charge at the time; none of the owners were in," she says. "I told him, 'I can't serve you at this bar wearing that shirt.' He said, 'Well, now who's the bigot?'"

The customer left, and Wardle thought that was the end of it. But a few days later, her phone started blowing up with messages from her bosses. She heard the guy she'd kicked out had posted about the incident on several far-right websites, and the bar was getting hit with negative reviews and posts. One now-deleted tweet from a local conservative activist even named Wardle specifically. The bar's owner worked quickly to have the online abuse taken down, but the experience contributed to Wardle's decision to find a different bartending job soon afterward. (Fearing further reprisals, the owner also asked that this story not name the bar.)

"I kick people out for being too drunk, but that was the first time I've had to deal with anything like this," Wardle says. "Like most bars, this is a small start-up. There was barely a training or an employee manual, let alone a policy for this situation. The idea of an alt-right person coming in the bar was not even in the owner's mind."

Make Westing's representative agrees: "If you're fighting or treating people poorly, you're kicked out; you're banned. But there was no specific policy on the Proud Boys." There's still no specific policy at Make Westing, and the representative is ambivalent about the bar being drawn into this controversy. "Hopefully it brought more good than bad, but I don't know."

Wardle doesn't regret her actions. "Wearing a hate group's shirt is a statement of hate; it was designed to provoke a reaction," she says. "Whether or not he was a member of this group, his shirt made him one. As bartenders, our responsibility goes way beyond just putting stuff in glasses. It's creating a space that's inviting and safe."

Most bars, of course, don't have constitutional scholars on staff. But there may be hope in numbers: In advance of the Unite the Right 2 rally in Washington, D.C. last August, the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington sent a "toolkit" to its members, affirming their freedom to refuse service to white nationalists and other political groups. The event and its counterprotests were relatively peaceful, especially compared with the deadly Charlottesville rally of 2017; D.C. saw only one arrest. But with hard-right groups growing ever more bold since the 2016 election, standoffs like these won't be going away anytime soon. Proprietors, pint pullers and patrons will have to decide for themselves whether extremist groups should hide in the shadows or be exposed to the (neon, possibly smoke-wreathed) light. ■

BETHANY GIURA

Photography by **JESTON BRANDON @PERFECTLYFLAWLESSPHOTO**
Model **@BETHANYGIURA**

Tell us something surprising about you?
 have a Bache ors of Sc ence n Finance.

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Playboy was a ways a huge dream of mine t is beyond excit ng for this to be my second P ayboy pub cation,

What inspires you?
 am inspired by love, fami y, and happiness. w I do anyth ng to ach eve someth ng for one of those rea sons.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modeling?
 chose to pursue a career in mode ing in order to boost my own self confidence. A l of my ife was picked on and bu ied about my ooks Mode ing has given me the opportun ty to fee beautifu and confident

Who do you look up to in the modeling industry?
After meeting Jess ca Cakes and see ng how humb e and k nd she s, def nite y ook up to her

What are some of your hobbies?
 love concerts, trave ing, sport ng events, and anyth ng active from running to pi ates.

Name three things on your bucket list?
1 To get my Doctorate degree
2 Start my own business.
3- Start my own char ty

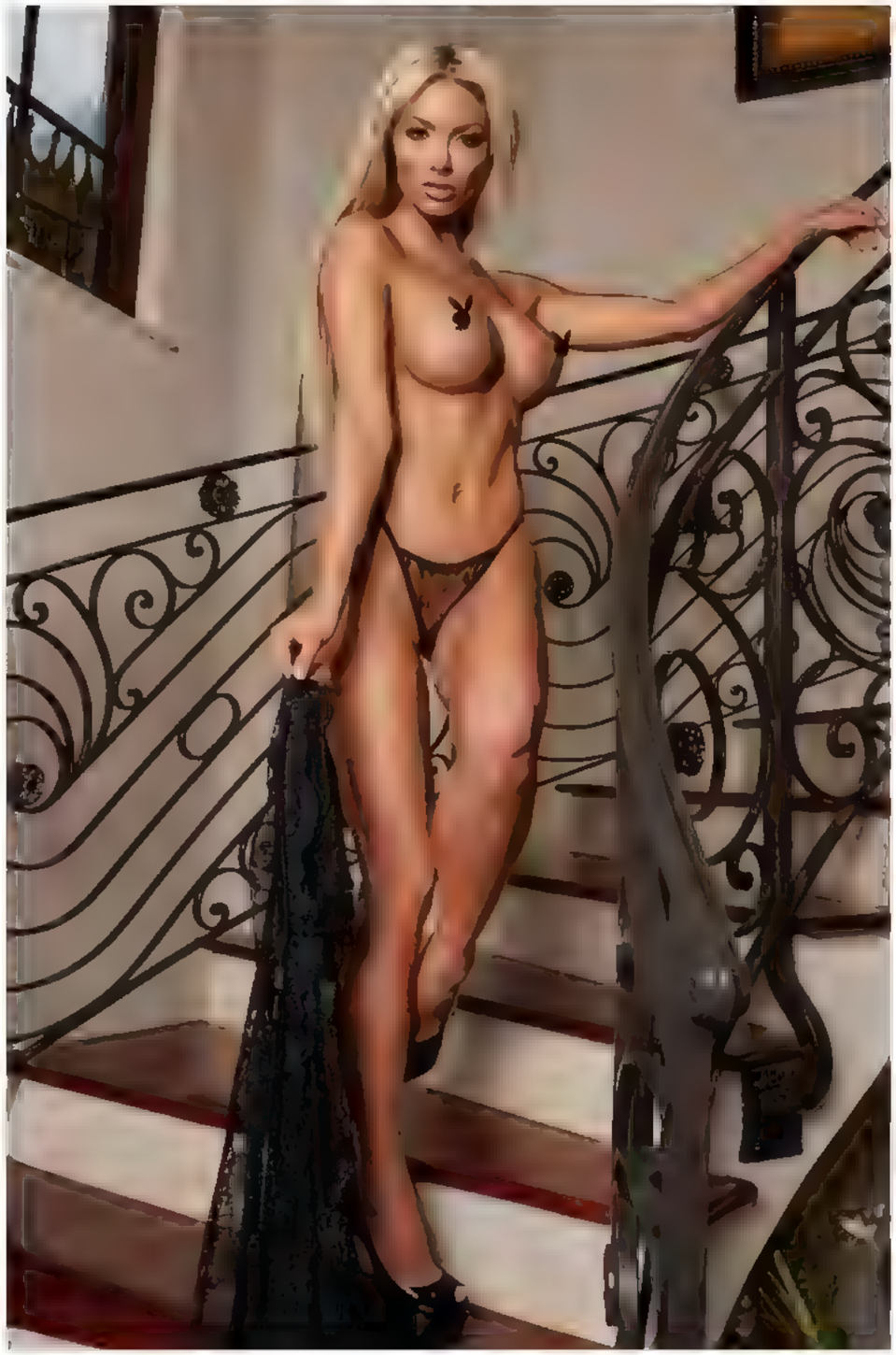
Turn-ons
A man who is a gent eman. Opening doors, covering me in the rain, and protect ng me go a ong way, a so am very turned on by tr.e chemistry.

Turn-offs
Noth ng wi turn me off more than a guy who is fu of himse f and cocky a so hate be ng ed to.

Describe to us your perfect date
My perfect date s anything with the man ove. t doesn't rea ly matter what we do as ong as we are to gether but picking me up w th f owers me ts my heart

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
 would most like to v s:t Ca ro, Egypt. | have a ways been fasc nated by the pyram ds

What is your mantra?
Spread Love.



TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE

BY **TERENA BELL**

IMAGINE A PROGRAM THAT COULD PREDICT YOUR EVERY FETISH, MEMORISE YOUR EVERY DESIRE. WOULD YOU USE IT? ONE PORN COMPANY THINKS YOU WOULD. INSIDE THE LATEST ADVANCEMENT IN SEX, TECH AND GETTING OFF

In the fourth season of *Silicon Valley*, HBO's Emmy winning, Cupertino mocking comedy series, one of the characters develops a visual-recognition app that can identify food in pictures, classifying every image as either "hot dog" or "not hot dog." When one of the guys uses the app to take a dick pic, he discovers that he does, in fact, have a "hot dog." They end up selling the technology to videostreaming app Periscope, which plans to use it to detect porn.

Visual recognition technology is, of course, nothing new. Most social media companies — dating apps included — use computer vision to enforce community guidelines and root out X rated images. If Instagram or Facebook has ever deleted one of your photos, it's because computer vision told it to. For the most part, its function has been to prevent adult content from spreading where it doesn't belong.

xHamster, one of the highest-trafficked porn sites, has other plans.

Currently, to find a specific scene on the site, users have to browse a category page or search a tag. xHamster vice president Alex Hawkins wants to move toward searches without words — ones in which "AI facial and body recognition tech" will access your viewing history "to identify similar performers or the same performer or similar videos." The question is, can it be done? Distinguishing one hot dog from another hot dog isn't easy — that is to say, recognising something as pornographic is a different skill from finding the best video for you. In a world where most computer vision technology is developed to identify tangible objects such as clothing and food, can an algorithm be trained to know your sexual desires?

The answer, according to Matias Klein, chief executive officer of the artificial intelligence company Kognition, depends on data. "The accuracy of the model is highly dependent on the quality of the input training data," he says. And data sets aren't always interchangeable. In other words, the same machine learning engine that recognises shirts and sandwiches won't instantly know porn. "Which categories will be created is a human level decision, not necessarily a computer task," explains Albert Bou Fadel, chief executive officer of technology company SmartBarrel. "It is a human filter that will decide what to keep as a category and what to disregard."

His question is a subjective one about what porn is and what it isn't. That's important, given that watching porn is a deeply personal experience. If we each have our own idea of what's sexy, how can we collectively train a computer? To the machine learning systems of today, there are few visual differences between nipple play and checking yourself for breast cancer. Both show a hand circling around nipples. One is clearly sexual, the other is not. This illustrates a problem Facebook has encountered and why the platform has been criticised for mislabelling photos of women breast feeding as porn. "Building and labelling a training data set and then designing and optimising a deep neural network is not a trivial task," Klein says.

In 2016, Yahoo made one of its deep-learning algorithms public by open sourcing its code for the entire internet to use. What's fascinating about that release is that Yahoo explicitly told the public its algorithm does not detect porn but rather flags visual content "not suitable/safe for work (NSFW), including offensive and adult images." As Yahoo research engineer Jay Mahadeokar and product manager Gerry Pesavento wrote in a company blog post, "Defining NSFW material is subjective." Unlike the hot dog app on Silicon Valley, Yahoo's system isn't designed to give users a hard yes or no. Instead, it analyses images individually, assigning each a score based on how likely it is to be offensive. "Developers can use this score to filter images below a certain suitable threshold," the two explained, "or use this signal to rank images in search results." Because we live in a time when you can't publish a NSFW detector without someone hacking it, a young computer programmer named Gabriel Goh quickly manipulated Yahoo's algorithm to produce extreme versions of NSFW imagery. (In programming speak, Goh accomplished this "by maximally activating certain neurons of the classifier.") If you were to look at the images — highly exaggerated, colourful, mutated and abstract versions of male and female genitalia — you'd notice there's little about them that's sexy. To echo United States Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's infamous words on porn, "I know it when I see it." This isn't it.

Because of how open source works — once code is shared with GitHub's tech community, it's available for anyone to play with — Yahoo can't track how many engineers have used the tool for its intended function. But people are indeed using it, based on the chat boards on start up accelerator Y Combinator. There, engineers have complained that Yahoo's system works well detecting porn for white performers but not for those of colour. One user, nsfwtch, suggests Yahoo's training data must have included more white actors, which brings us back to Klein's point about the importance of data.

Indeed, the porn industry has been heavily criticised for treating minority performers more as fetishes than people. According to a 2013 study from data journalist Jon Millward, "Deep Inside: A Study of 10,000 Porn Stars and Their Careers," 70.5 percent of female stars are white. But user aab0 notes that the difference in system performance may "also reflect what is most distinguishable. Which is easier for [the computer] to confidently distinguish: black pubic hair on black skin, or black pubic hair on white skin? Darker nipples on black skin, or darker nipples on white skin?"

Nipple colour, waxed versus unwaxed pubic regions and other precise physical characteristics are where visual recognition may truly revolutionise search. "This level of specificity is hard to do with keyword searches alone," says Hawkins. "Specifically, with a platform like ours, where self-produced amateur content is often uploaded without significant keywords or descriptive text, these unarticulated visual identifiers can help connect the content." In his view, a computer may be better able than language to tell us what we want. With xHamster's system, which the company began developing in July 2017, Hawkins says, "the AI can help identify performers similar to one a viewer already likes, matching body and facial structure and other identifying features."

Hawkins points out that xHamster isn't using Yahoo's tech — its own tech is already in use. For example: When you visit xHamster.com, the site drops a cookie that tracks the videos you view. When one clip ends, the system uses that video's visuals to recommend what you should watch next. Right now, the software focuses on facial characteristics and body types. An ideal system would pick up on every other visual element that could make or break the mood. From large tattoos to badly lit rooms, from women pulling back their hair with 1980s headbands to nature settings, visual recognition software could help porn platforms create an endless array of previously unimagined categories.

"This," Hawkins says, "becomes increasingly important as we move toward virtual reality productions, which move consumers further and further away from the keyboard." In November, xHamster launched a VR platform that allows viewers to navigate using eye movement. This is critical to bringing a VR world alive — and because our eyes naturally fixate on what our brains deem attractive, eye tracking might one day also help visual search pinpoint exactly which seconds of video turn us on the most. "Our current database now includes more than 1 million individuals and 300 million videos," Hawkins explains — everything from real life exhibitionist couples to independently produced fetish clips. At the time of this writing, xHamster's internal tech team had analysed some 35,000 of these videos, webcam performances and studio clips.

Hawkins claims the goal isn't just to offer better search results but to help fans and performers connect to create a pathway to finding more porn featuring the people they like. Visual recognition won't stop at recommending another (possibly free) clip to stream. It will direct — and up-sell — you to upcoming webcam engagements or specific channels.

Of course, in threesome and orgy videos, xHamster's system still isn't sophisticated enough to determine who turns you on the most. As with computerised translation, chatbot development and other types of machine learning, AI engines learn not only from the data engineers who train them but from real people who provide feedback on system results. Along with eye tracking, user feedback might someday help xHamster pinpoint which performers are more engaging.

Bou Fadel calls visual recognition "a work in progress," something that will take years to perfect. "Computer vision today is still a black box. There's a lot of science and theories of how it works, but for the most part, we're scraping the surface," he says. In the meantime, hackers, xHamster's team and porn giants will continue to tweak algorithms, unveil virtual reality programs and track your viewing, all in an effort to find a single formula for predicting the sexual desires of all humankind. The biggest takeaway? Deleting your browser history may soon become pointless. ■

IS PORN A HUMAN RIGHT?

ADULT CONTENT SEEMS TO BE EVERYWHERE—WITH ONE OMINOUS EXCEPTION

It's a fact: One of America's most popular pastimes, which in turn satisfies a biological need, is also one of the most denounced and contested: the consumption of adult content. Porn is a vast and limitless ocean that feels ubiquitous to those of us who can freely access it. But in America's correctional facilities, it's at risk of being outlawed amid increasing government overreach. Do prisoners have a right to the same sexual imagery as the rest of society?

Policies vary from state to state, but in 2017, Charles E. Sisney, an inmate in South Dakota backed by the American Civil Liberties Union, challenged the state's Department of Corrections' pornography policy, which bans prisoners from purchasing or possessing adult content.

Similar bans have popped up in Nebraska, Connecticut and Michigan. The general argument is that banning adult content promotes safer environments and quicker rehabilitation, but virtually no studies have examined the links, positive or negative, between porn consumption and inmate behaviour. These bans can also create underground barter systems, wherein pornography that slips through can fetch a potentially violent premium in prison yards.

The question is, if states can police adult content in prisons, will they stop there? What counts as "pornographic," and will the authorities know it when they see it? Not so coincidentally, Sisney's court case in South Dakota had him also challenging the confiscation of manga comics, erotic novels and a book of modern art — reading material all deemed too explicit by the Department of Corrections. And in Florida, *Prison Legal News* is petitioning the Supreme Court over the state's ban on the magazine in prisons. It may be a leap to suggest that restricting the consumption of certain media by populations deemed to be less worthy will threaten one of the most important promises on which this country was founded. It's not a leap, however, to suggest that *censorship* may be a word we're seeing up to too often. — *Anita Little*

Red Tide RISING

What if the only way to make America great again is to embrace the political system it has historically feared most?

BY **ADAM SKOLNICK**
ILLUSTRATION BY **RIKI BLANCO**

Last October, President Trump wrote a *USA Today* op-ed in which he argued that Democrats have become "radical socialists who want to model America's economy after Venezuela. If Democrats win control of Congress, they will come dangerously closer to socialism in America." Well, Democrats won the House and fell short in the Senate. So what happens if they conjure a clean sweep in 2020? Should America fear economic collapse at the hands of socialists in Democratic pantsuits?

It's worth asking, because at this moment all across America tens of thousands of socialists are working to take the reins of government and when they run, they campaign largely as Democrats. The way Trump and the GOP spin it, socialism breeds economic doom. But what drives the new American socialist hustle is the counter-intuitive idea, rooted in economic theory and hard data, that socialist policies could actually grow the economy. According to the numbers, if they really wanna MAGA, the smart move would be to embrace a political model America learned to loathe long ago.

The Democratic Socialists of America, the most visible socialist organisation in the country, launched in 1982 as a coalition of Marxist holdouts who had weathered the red scare of the 1950s — when Communist Party members were tracked by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI, interrogated by Senator Joseph McCarthy, fired from jobs and blacklisted in Hollywood — and younger activists who emerged from the antiwar movement of the late 1960s. The DSA had 6,000 charter members but had been in the shadows for more than 30 years.

Then Bernie happened.

The only democratic socialist in the Senate, Bernie Sanders promised Medicare for all, free college tuition and a $15 minimum wage, and he stoked his 2016 campaign with the rage of those fed up with playing a rich man's rigged game. Federal Reserve data show that the top 10 percent of Americans in 2016 owned 77 percent of the country's wealth (the top one percent owned 38.5 percent), while 40 percent of Americans would have to sell something to cover a $400 emergency expense. According to Dean Baker, a senior economist at the Center for Economic and Policy Research, the child poverty rate in the U.S. is more than 20 percent. To Sanders and his followers, none of that adds up.

Bianca Cunningham, a young African American labour organiser, was one of those followers. Cunningham, now 33, wasn't particularly political until she graduated from college and took a retail job at Verizon Wireless in Brooklyn, where she heard about and experienced sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace. She contacted the Communication Workers of America, seeking support, and went on to unionise seven Brooklyn Verizon stores. The CWA was deeply involved with Occupy Wall Street and was one of the few unions to endorse Sanders. Early in his candidacy, Sanders appeared alongside Cunningham in front of a Verizon store.

"After he lost," Cunningham says, "we thought, Are we gonna let this momentum die or build off of this? So we ducked under the existing DSA umbrella. That was the beginning." The DSA had been involved with the Sanders campaign since 2015, so it was a natural fit. Cunningham remembers that at her first DSA meeting, in the summer of 2016, she saw only 25 people. Then 50. The first gathering after Trump won, she recalls seeing 500. This so-called Trump bump happened in chapters across the country.

Meanwhile, a handful of former Bernie campaign staffers formed an organisation called Brand New Congress, with a mission to elect a range of congressional candidates under a common platform inspired by Sanders's campaign. They hoped to raise enough money to run more than 400 candidates — "regular people like us," says executive director Isra Allison, "teachers, engineers, scientists" — and wound up with 31 in the 2018 primaries. BNC is not affiliated with the DSA, but its breakout star, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, also a former Bernie staffer and the youngest woman ever elected to Congress, came out of the revitalised New York City DSA.

Ocasio-Cortez is not alone. Card-carrying DSA member Rashida Tlaib was elected to represent Detroit in Congress. And before either of them made headlines, the DSA's Lee Carter, a Marine Corps veteran, was elected to Virginia's House of Delegates from a Republican district.

Point to just about any relevant political scrum of 2018 and the DSA was there. That West Virginia teachers' strike that resulted in a five percent salary bump was sparked by DSA affiliates in the state. When the family-separation crisis was white hot, it was Metro D.C. DSA members who tracked down Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen and shamed her out of a Mexican restaurant. DSA members were in a Senate office on Capitol Hill during the Kavanaugh protests.

According to a recent BuzzFeed poll, 48 percent of millennial Democrats and 23 percent of millennial Republicans identify as democratic socialists. "We have no recollection of the Cold War," Cunningham says. "We didn't live through the red scare. We don't have these stigmas in our mind." There are now 52,000 active DSA members and counting.

Trump and the GOP don't like their policies because they'll demand higher taxes on the rich — a four to 12 percent hike, according to Baker. In the Republicans' preferred free-market model, economic growth comes only from business investment, not government. That's why they passed the nearly 40 percent corporate tax cut that sent the deficit soaring.

As much as Republicans enjoy watching cash trickle down, the engine of any economy is not corporate investment but aggregate demand — the day-to-day spending on goods and services. Socialist economist Richard Wolff calls the policies that Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez seek "trickle-up economics." They want to put money back into the hands of everyday people and let it circulate. Consider this: Venezuela doesn't have an elaborate social safety net; Norway does. There, 80 percent of the country is middle income (compared with America's 52 percent), and the economy is thriving.

America has tried it here before. After the Great Depression, President Roosevelt, compelled by organised labour and a fierce, pre-blacklist Communist Party, pushed a New Deal through Congress, establishing Social Security, a minimum wage and a jobs program. And they taxed the rich to pay for it. The 1944 GI Bill helped working-class veterans attend college for free. What happened next was a wholesale redistribution of wealth and 30 years of sustained growth that the majority of Americans shared. The New Deal built the modern middle class. It hatched the American dream.

You might have heard of those days, the ones so many are nostalgic for. You know, back when America was "great." ■

CELEBRITIES ARE SUPER COOL

At a time when the free press is under attack, we sent Broad City's Paul W. Downs to execute the highest form of journa ism: the ce ebrity profile

BY **PAUL W. DOWNS**

As I sit at the bar at the Hearth & Hound in Hollywood, a hip restaurant my subject suggested because it's helmed by a female chef, I can't decide if I should get a drink or not. Maybe a drink will take the edge off, cool my nerves. I've done this kind of thing countless times, and yet somehow I'm nervous. I guess it's not that surprising. It's not every day I get to profile a bona fide multihyphenate. Paul W. Downs is a comedian, actor, writer, producer and director. And judging from his body, he could be a dancer. But I don't want to drink if he's not drinking, so I order a sparkling water and wait.

I don't even need to look behind me to know he's entered the room. People in the restaurant perk up. When I do turn around, I realise it's because he's waving to them, blowing kisses at random patrons. He doesn't seem to know these people, but it doesn't matter — that's just how warm he is, how generous with his attention. Standing an impressive five-foot-nine, he somehow seems larger, more commanding.

"Sorry I'm late," he says. "I was just driving back from canvassing in a congressional swing district up north." Wow. How Downs finds time to volunteer is hard to imagine. At the time of this interview, he had just wrapped shooting in New York on the critically acclaimed *Broad City's* fifth and final season, launching in January. Not only is he one of the show's main writers, an executive producer and a beloved cast member (he plays Trey Pucker), this season Downs is adding "director" to his repertoire.

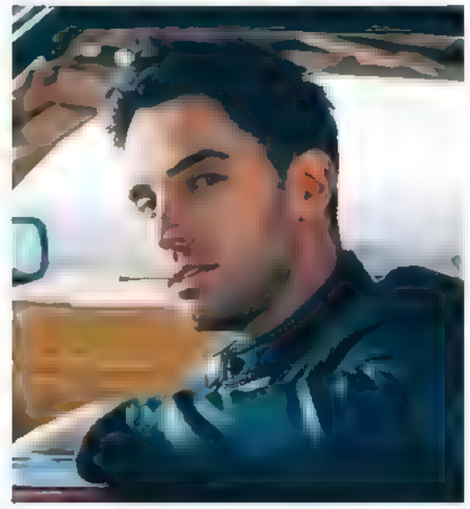
But this is only the tip of the iceberg. With his partner and live-in girlfriend, Lucia Aniello, Downs helms a production company called Paulilu (a clever take on Desilu); the company produced 2017's *Rough Night* (which grossed nearly $50© million at the box office) and Comedy Central's *Time Traveling Bong*, a prestige miniseries. He's currently writing a Kevin Hart movie for Universal and producing a sketch show that's in development at the aforementioned cable channel. And those are just the projects he's "allowed" to talk about.

"Oh, you're just having water? Mind if I drink?" he asks. Damn. Guess I should have had that cocktail after all. He orders a glass of Rioja, so I get one too. Downs has a disarming quality about him. He looks, as the internet will attest, like a Disney prince. His dark brown hair and blue-grey eyes twinkle as he talks. But it's his quick wit and bawdy humour that make him such an enigma. He reminds me of a young Martin Short with the sex appeal of Jessica Rabbit. And then our conversation begins.

DOWNS: Your most recent film role is in Netflix's Like Father, which was the streaming service's number one movie in 100 countries the weekend it premiered.
DOWNS: I know — pretty crazy.
DOWNS: Kelsey Grammer is known for his iconic roles on television but hasn't made so many films. Was it your involvement that drew him to the project?
DOWNS: No, no. He and Kristen Bell were already attached when I was cast.
DOWNS: Really? I'm surprised. Well, in the film you play a family psychologist who is obsessed with the relationship between Kelsey and Kristen. What did it feel like to give advice to one of TV's most iconic therapists, Dr. Frasier Crane?
DOWNS: Oh, it was so trippy. But an honour.
DOWNS: How do you stay in shape?
DOWNS: Right now, a lot of volunteering. You burn a lot of calories walking door to door and canvassing. Also, resistance training.

Clearly I go on. "As a movie star —" but he stops me. "I'm not a movie star," he says earnestly. "But you are," I tell him. "You star in *Rough Night* opposite Scarlett Johansson, with Kate McKinnon, Jillian Bell, Ilana Glazer and Zoë Kravitz."

"Well, when you put it that way, I guess. But I don't consider myself a movie star." It's that kind of humility that is so surprising, so refreshing from someone as awe-inspiring as he is. His ability to stay grounded, his modesty — not to mention small pores — are what make him so appealing. He's a hot movie star who doesn't even know he's a hot movie star. I'd say he was stupid for not knowing, but I can't, because he's objectively so damn smart.



DOWNS: In *Rough Night* you play Scarlett Johansson's love interest. Scarlett has obviously had her share of on-screen romances. How thrilling do you think it was for her to kiss you?
DOWNS: [*He flashes that movie-star smile, narrowing his eyes and shaking his head. He's not going there….*] You'd have to ask her that.

So we did. And she declined to comment. But this journalist can only infer why: Paul W. Downs was probably the best kisser she'd ever encountered, and she didn't want to insult the likes of Chris Evans, Hugh Jackman, Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz.

At this point we have finished our drinks. I tell him PLAYBOY will pay, but he insists on covering the bill. Chivalry isn't dead! At the valet stand, I start to call a Lyft. "I can give you a ride home if you want," he offers. I say I shouldn't, but he insists.

Downs hits the gas — well, the pedal — of his Lexus hybrid SUV. It's incredibly smooth, and I feel my stomach drop. "Don't worry, I got you," he says as we slow for traffic. I learn that the car isn't even his. It's his girlfriend's. It might seem hard to look badass in your girlfriend's hybrid, but somehow he does. I can't help but look down at his body, at the slate jeans hugging his thick thighs. I'm in a long-term monogamous relationship with a woman, but I still think to myself, *Yeah, I'd hit that.*

We arrive at my hotel. As I get out, I wonder if I should ask him up. I don't want this night to end. But I decide that's crazy, so we say our good-byes. It's not like me to editorialise or fan out, especially to an interview subject, but I can't help it. "You're one of the greatest comedic minds of our generation," I blurt out. "I wouldn't say that," he says. I fire back, "Well, I would. And I'll be publishing it in this magazine." He smiles that smile and drives off. I go up to my room, call room service for another Rioja and masturbate until I fall asleep.

Editor's note: Paul W. Downs was asked to provide 1,200 words for this piece but turned in more than 8,000. Special thanks to his editor for his overtime on this feature.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **NICK RASMUSSEN**

Playboy Advisor

Sex columnist **Anna del Gaizo** offers some "father y" advice to a woman who can't bite her tongue in the bedroom P us, advice on rolling in the hay, shower sex and separation anxiety

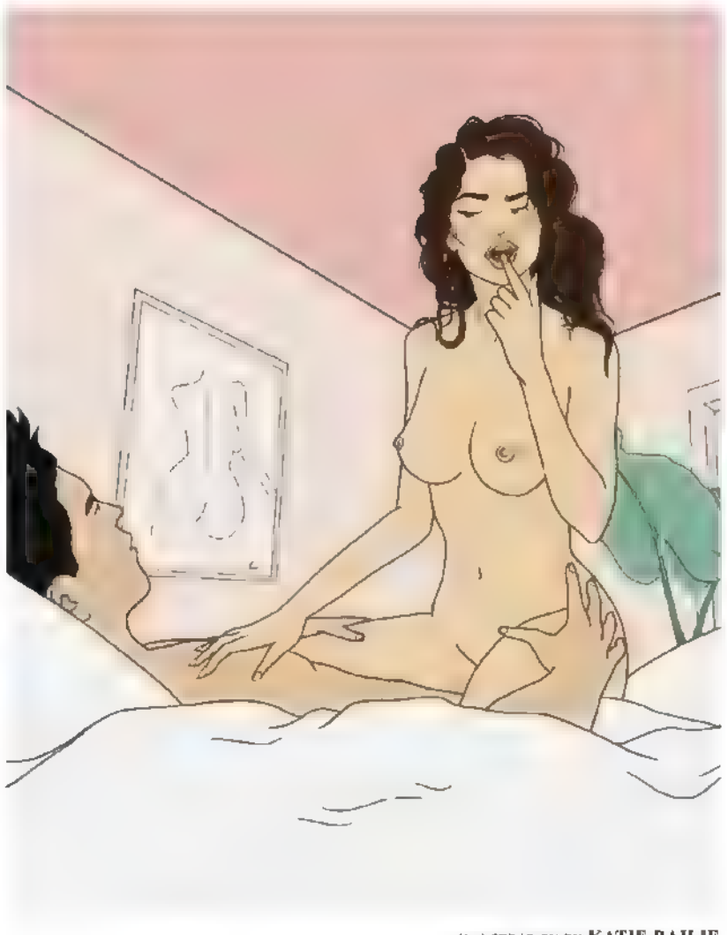
Q: ***I think I'm addicted to calling men "daddy" during sex. It just comes out! Sometimes they're into it; other times they freak out. I know what you're thinking: daddy issues, right? But I have a relatively healthy relationship with my father. I never used the word in this context before my last boyfriend, when it just happened to become our sexual dynamic. Now I'm hooked. What does it mean, and what should I do?—J.K., Pella, Iowa***

A: Indeed, most people assume that if you have the urge to call your sexual partners "daddy" during sex, you must have daddy .ssues. Most people are wrong. That argument may have held sway when Sex and the City was considered an authority on all things libidinous, but it's a new day. You don't have a Lolita complex either. Any adult woman — or man — with a healthy amount of self-esteem is free to get off on father-figure fantasies without needing a trip to the therapist. Thanks to the ubiquity of May–December relationships, plus Ty Dolla $.gn's immortal song "Zaddy" (though it's important to point out zaddy and daddy denote two different personas, a zaddy is a sexy man with swag, while a daddy is an attractive older man) and the internet's meme-ification of the word, the once salacious and incestuous moniker has become as destigmatised as anal sex.

Thus, in 2019, whispering "Daddy!" in a dude's ear might as well be the equivalent of telling him "You're hot." That's because "daddy" doesn't suggest just age but value — the oldest, best or biggest. Whether it's a reflection of our innate desire to feel subservient in sex or to challenge taboos, this fixation is nothing more than human nature at play.

What was once forbidden is now verging on vanil.a — but that doesn't mean every guy you pounce on wants to play papa. I'm guessing you and your ex had a, well, robust sex life — not that it sho..d be of much consequence now. The last thing any of us wants is to be sized up against a sexual partner's ex in bed.

When you call men "daddy" in the throes of pass.on, you're putting on a performance — one that may make you feel simultaneously innocent, insurgent and vixen-like. You're also giving him power. Is it possible the less control you feel, the more earth-shattering your orgasm? Fantasies make sex fun, and let's not forget that who we are during sex rarely a.igns with who we presen. as in .ife. But both partners need to desire a fantasy, and that can't be forced. Read the (bed)room, quit imposing th.s on squeamish men, and keep your addiction in check. Better yet, try indu.ging in some of h.s fantasies. You'll eventually discover one that gets you both off.



ILL.STRAT.ON BY **KATIE BAILIE**

Q: ***I love partying on molly instead of drinking or smoking weed. The problem is, even though I feel extremely horny while high I can't get hard. Is there such a thing as micro dosing molly so I can be hard and high at the same time?—K.H.,***

A: L.fe is a cruel jokester, isn't it? What makes us horny also keeps us from coming. First, if you choose to do molly, keep in mind that it's .legal. Second, if you do ingest, do so .n moderation, as you don't want to .ose your brainpower along with your boner. Molly — in theory, MDMA in its purest form — causes a generous release in the brain of serotonin, dopam.ne and norepinephrine, all neurotransm.tters that make you feel happy. It also increases oxytocin, often cal.ed "the love hormone," which helps solidify emotional bonds. In other words, molly elevates you to vertiginous levels of euphoria and desire. You become a touchy, emotional, overly aware .ust machine.

At the same time, some effects of MDMA are similar to those of adrenal.ne. It serves as a vasoconstrictor, narrow.ng blood vessels to your penis, among other areas. No blood flow means no hard-on, which means no climax. Th.s is what you're experiencing, and it's why no matter how sexual you may feel while rolling, you can't close the deal. There's a reason molly and its MDMA-centric predecessors have had a reputation as nothing more than a "party drug" since the heyday of S.udio 54: It's best suited for dancing, soc.alising and cuddling.

Although microdosing psychedel.cs is trending these days, we're talking about aligning stimulated brain chemistry with the pulse of your circulatory system. There's no guarantee that .sing less of a psychoactive over a longer time will simultaneously make you horny and hard.

I must note that a cocktail of Viagra and MDMA, two substances that can impact your blood pressure, will seriously harm your cardiovascular system and could cause a heart attack. Don't even think abou. mixing the two. If you're hell-bent on blending the joys of sex with the thr.l of a dopamine rush, here's a tip: Try falling in love instead.

Q: ***I just got my own one-bedroom apartment for the first time and want to make it a place that impresses women as much as it does my parents when they visit. But I don't have a trust fund. What can I do to elevate my place without breaking the bank?—J.U.,***

A: Congratulations! Bonus points for .anding your first adult apartment and doing it on your own. When in doubt, or in debt, keep it simple. Eliminate clutter by hiding it.n something multifunctional .ike a handsome wooden storage bench. Dump anything that whispers "college dorm," such as multihead floor lamps. If your bed isn't a place you rea.ly want to sleep, how can you expect anyone else to want to sleep there? Invest in a queen- or king-size wi.h a headboard, high-thread-count sheets (a combed cotton will work) and matching pillow shams.

Bare wa.ls are a mood k.ller; even a single accent wal. painted a soft, ne.tral colour enhances a room. Tape on walls is even worse, so frame your posters and prints. Naked windows w.ll make your interior feel cold and do nothing to protect from harsh morning light, spring for a set of curtains — which are cheaper and more elegant than bl.nds. If you're ab e to renovate an entire room, start by upgrading old fixtures — all you need is a screwdriver and new doorknobs, cabinet hardware and light-switch covers.

L.ghting can also make a difference. You don't need to invest in pricey new fixtures; just switch in 60-watt light bulbs for fluorescents, which make even the nicest furniture .ook austere. Finally, a coffeemaker, an extra set of fluffy towels and a clean bathroom — don't forget the bath mat — will ensure your apartment is a place where women won't regret spend ng the night.

Q: ***Are steam-room hookups just something Hollywood made up? I joined a new gym, and the locker room is full of hot women. (Yes, I'm a lesbian.) I'm not into public sex; I'm talking about following someone into a shower stall and discreetly eating her out. I would like to explore this, but I'm afraid I'll end up getting banned — or, even worse, humiliated. —R.G.,***

A: Fear not: Such illicit hookups aren't merely myths. As many gay men will attest, the gym locker room has been known to facilitate many sweat-soaked Grindr trysts. The women's room, however, doesn't play host to .al that much action, in my experience. Call it the double standard of cruising.

That's not to say it doesn't happen. Public sex, from restaurant bathrooms to department store fitting rooms to remote beaches and beyond, is as timeless as .t is tantalising. But let's be c.ear: It's one thing to sneak into a shower stall with a woman you already know (go for it, if you don't care about your gym membership) and another to force yourself on an .nsuspecting stranger. There's nothing wrong with wanting your reality to be a little more pornographic, but don't get accused of sexual assault in the process. Never follow someone into a public shower stall, no questions asked.

Q: ***My wife of 10 years told me she wants to see other people as a kind of test. We both realise things haven't been perfect in our marriage, but I didn't see this coming. She has already gone for it, and I let her because I want to respect her wishes. But I'm out of practice. I don't know how to pick up women, let alone tell them I'm married. I've never even used a dating app. How do married people date in 2019?—P.W. Ypsilanti***

A: It may be tempting to wallow in doubt, but you need to view this as an opportunity. You've been granted more than a hall pass: You've been given an entire summer break, and there's no better time to pursue self-discovery.

But first, some questions. What do you want from this? Do your friends know? Did you "let her" go for .t because you secretly yearned to dabble yourself? It sounds as though you didn't have much of a choice, but there's no going back, so start by embracing what lies ahead.

There's a big difference between two married people dating as a couple and two married people dating independently. You're in the latter category. Essentially, you re now a single man in the dating world. You don't need to announce you're married to every woman you meet, nor should you. Slap t on your profile when you download a dating app (or five). If your closest friends are aware of the situation, start by getting out there the old-fash.oned way: Go to a bar, social gathering, sports event, networking party — any or all of the above — and just talk to other women. If that doesn't do it, here's a refresher on popular dating apps and the varying levels of discretion they offer: Bumble, which lets women pick up men, is your best option since you're hesitant to approach women right off the bat; Raya is for influencers and successful creatives (the size of your Instagram following factors in whether you can play there); and Tinder provides endless options for people who want to "see a movie," a.k.a. get laid fast. Even Instagram can function as a dating app. (Oh, and avoid Hinge, which can make matches based on mutual Facebook friends.) Try a few, commit to one and go fish. Get a sense of who else is swimming in the sea. There are no hard-and-fast rules for messaging on apps aside from starting all conversations with hello. And guess what — you're not required to meet any of these women in person unless you actually want to.

Now, on to the topic of sharing your marital status. Don't .ie, but don't overshare either. Technically you're separated, so give the wedding band a break while you and your wife figure out what you both want. (Unless, of course, she's still wearing hers on dates. She likely isn't.) Stop thinking of yourself as someone's husband and start thinking of yourself as the man you are. Any well-adjusted woman who says she's never had to confront questions of monogamy and commitment is lying to you. In other words, don't stand for any of your dates judging you. A marriage in harmony, an abundant dating .ife — both .ifestyles are great. But neither outranks finding autonomy and happiness in yourself. Use this time wisely.

CASSIE LEE

Tell us something surprising about you?
ove to trave and meet new peop e, I am very open-m nded. also ove to be at home with fami y and fr ends

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Yes, th s is my first publicat on as a mode and was def n te y excited to f nd out cou d be in such a huge magazine

What inspires you?
ove he ping other peop e, worked as a nurse for a year and it was so reward ng and ke to he p my friends w th their makeup and sty e and mot vate them.

Why did you choose to pursue a career in modelling?
A oca photographer fr end kept asking to shoot with me and I fina y said okay and ever since kept want ng to do different ooks and earn how to be a mode

Who do you look up to in the modelling industry?
ook up to Adriana Lima, she is obv ous y gorgeous and successfu but she seems down to Earth and natura .

What are some of your hobbies?
ove to work out, it give me endorphins and makes me fee great enjoy trave ng especia y to the beach, ove to shop and going out wearing nice sexy outfits

Name three things on your bucket list?
have a ways wanted to go to Europe and trave by tra n to see the different countries. a so want to go snorke ng in the Car bbean. Last, I want to be ab e to he p kids in need and vo unteer t me to an organ zation.

Turn-ons
A smart guy who takes care of themse ves and works out, ove abs on a guy

Turn-offs
When a guy is too into themse ves and doesn't care about what s going on around them

Describe to us your perfect date
A perfect date wou d be a nice romant c wa k on a beach or a romantic dinner n the city

Which world capital would you most like to visit, and why?
wou d ove to visit Seou South Korea to see and experience their cu ture

What is your mantra?
Be someone who makes you happy ove this mantra. think ts important to not re y on anything or anyone e se to make us happy.

REPERCUSSIONS

Mindy fakes everything except her climax

FICTION BY **CHUCK PALAHNIUK**

Mindy grabbed the knife. Practised this she had not. They hadn't rehearsed anything because Benjamin, Benny, was hopeless. If he so much as sneezed it sounded fake.

The Singers had set out a brisket, sliced and everything nice, with the carving knife sticking out at a help-yourself angle. Little pots of different World Market mustards sitting around the platter. The perfect witnesses: the Singers, the Goldblatts, the Futters, the Hartzogs and the Taubmans. That girl, that Myra, from the yoga place, she was there for whatever reason. Mindy waited until Leo Hartzog pointed his camera phone recording Ilene telling some cockamamie story about pitching something to Google. That's when Mindy wrapped her fist around the knife handle. Some stainless steel German job. A Wüsthof brisket slicer. She'd downed only the one dirty martini Len Futter had handed her.

She yanked the knife out of the brisket. Too hard, obviously. Adrenaline would do that. Too fast, to judge from how the brisket toppled. Toppled and rolled, a slab of dead meat batting aside little pots of mustard, ramekins of chopped onions, the brisket escaping the platter and greasing a path across the limed oak table. From West Elm? From Pottery Barn? Before taking a plunge — blat — onto poor Yael Singer's cowhide accent rug. A juicy splat that piqued everyone's attention until Mindy swung the serrated blade toward Benny's neck.

She brought the knife down, the dull side not the honed edge, chopping his shoulder. With no more force than an Arthurian queen bestowing knighthood upon him. Reddish Chinese mustard and yellow-brown honey mustard all over the white collar and sleeve of his Perry Ellis dress shirt.

His cow-eyed, slaughterhouse expression — here was something her husband could've faked never had he lived to be Methuselah. With her free hand Mindy caught his wrist and twisted that arm behind his back. Held the knife against the bobble of his Adam's apple and sawed it back and forth. Against the little dots of Benny's shaved beard. She held him the way she'd play a hairy cello. No one noticed, what with mustard on the

ILLUSTRATION BY **RIKI BLANCO**

blade, how she was pressing the dull side of the knife against his windpipe, harmless messy but harmless. Bowing him like a cello. No, no amount of rehearsing could've brought these tears to Benny's eyes or made him keen the way he did. Like a dolphin he sounded, or like some killer whale, keening.

She screamed, "Rape me again, you dirty, penis-stinking bastard, and I'll kill you!" And to Ben's credit he played along with her routine. For his crying, he'd later blame the horseradish. Mixed in some mustard it was, held so close to his tear ducts.

Even in that moment, with the camera phone rolling, Mindy had to wonder who'd served Dylan Thomas those 18 shots of whiskey at the White Horse Tavern. Wondering: Was whoever poisoned Dylan Thomas someone helpful? Or maybe some bartender who yearned to see dead the preeminent Welsh poet of the age. That's where Mindy's head was at: disassociation. Hers was a classic case of disassociation.

Mindy worked the serrated brisket slicer against her husband's throat with the Goldblatts and the Taubmans and the others watching, and she delivered the line they'd agreed upon. A second time, quietly, almost hissing, "Rape me again, you bastard…." This wasn't improvisation. She'd been warning him since Noah's attack. Their performance was all about Noah's attack. And finally Benny recognised his cue.

To his credit, Benny wrapped his strong, sober hand around hers and choked her wrist and rapped her hand, twice, against the Singers' silk wallpaper, until she let go. The knife diving to stab the wood floor at their feet. Chilli-infused mustard spattered, red-brown, on the pretty wall.

The scene, like some old world saying Mindy's long departed Unka would always say at such a time, this was. Half of what the man said a real person knew to not hear, but on occasion her Unka had been touched like genius.

Yael Singer stooped over the fallen brisket. Her hands hovered above it, hesitated and sprung forward to clamp together on the slab. Her face twisted in a grimace, she hefted the meat and carried it at arm's length like so much butchered… flesh. The awful stain it left, a red puddle, as if Benny had actually bled out. Mindy hadn't been chopping, but they'd seen chopping. Myra from yoga stood with both hands palmed over her mouth. She screamed a moment too late as if meeting some obligation, the silly girl. A thin someone-needed-to-scream scream.

Benny held Mindy's wrist with a power she'd forgotten he had. He'd been conflicted about the rape line, when they'd discussed it. But she was glad to say it twice. Glad for the camera phone. How it might all look in court. In their moment of faked struggle she considered collapsing against him, but the mustard would spoil her vintage Bill Blass. She'd had her hair set that afternoon. The look she was working was Dynasty. Like Alexis Colby chopping off Krystle Carrington's head on that one episode of Dynasty.

"Yael," Benny said when she brought the coats. He regretted the wallpaper, silk handwoven with green parakeets, from China. He'd told her, "The brisket was delicious."

His shirt smelled so good Mindy had to swallow. On the way home, she made Benny stop for takeout at Arby's.

With the red brown smears on his cheeks and nose, Benny looked like their Noah had. Like father, like son. Like Noah had looked coming home from school.

In all honesty her Benjamin, Benny, he wouldn't rape a fly. Their next act should be her filing a restraining order against him. Subpoenaing hostile witnesses and the like. The first parents to pull this stunt, they were not. Checking into a shelter for abused women, Mindy should be. They needed to build a narrative, she argued, but Benny put the kibosh on her women's sheltering.

Oh, the injustice that her Noah, her baby boy, should be compelled by cold geography to attend the school he did. An institute of higher learning that boasted a Prison Skillz Track. A verified course of matriculation. A public academy that offered a sex worker track. A prizefighter her Noah was not. No more than his father could act his way out of a paper bag. For the steep taxes they paid, their Noah should go to school to be a punching bag?

A boy of such rich talents? Gifted how he was, this boy was wasted on Ansel Park, when where he wanted to go was Delmar Fields, a magnet school. Japanese immersion they had. So what if Delmar Fields was three districts over?

Who the animals were, Noah wouldn't say. Who'd beaten him bloody, they were juveniles. For any low-life animal boys to see another boy so gifted by fate, these less fortunate would understandably go crazy jealous. Especially seeing how they'd tested too low to be anything in life, and Noah, here's Noah excelling in Computer Lab and seeing a girl Mindy couldn't remember the name of except this girl was an angel from what Noah told people.

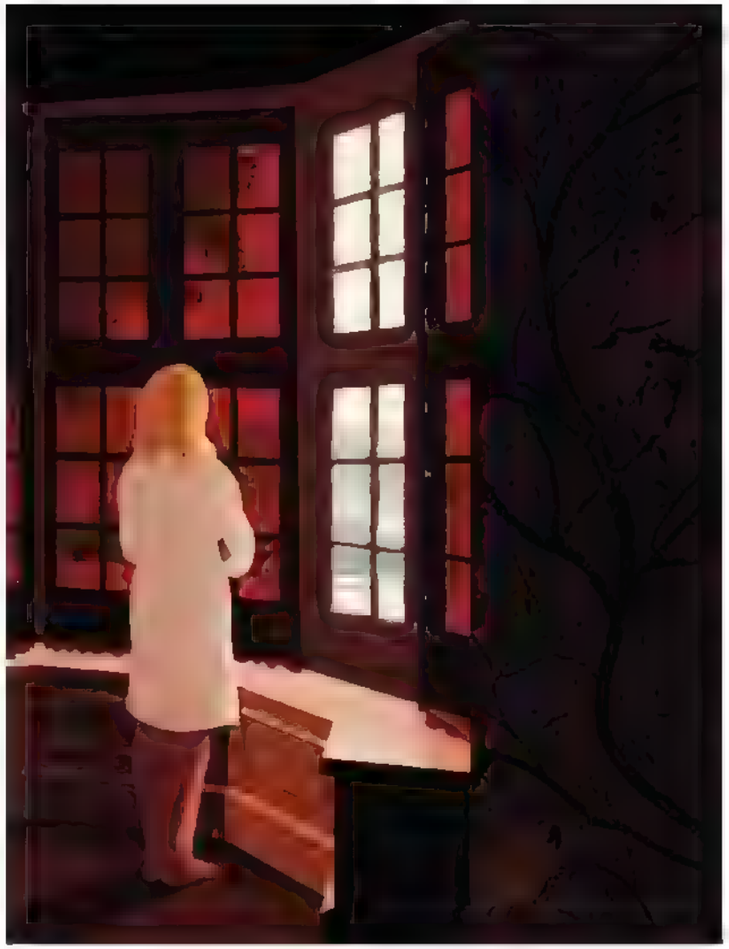
Already families like the Brumes paid for schools, plenty. Paid for the free breakfasts and free hot lunches for such animal vermin who'd send a child home with almost a broken nose. At issue was the principle of the thing.

Driving home from the Singers', Mindy had said as much. "Stop by the Arby's," she'd said. "I want you should see the big picture here."

Mister Social Justice. Mister Make-Everything-Right, Benny wanted they should foot the bill for private school. Was he crazy? He was crazy. A family should pay twice over, through property taxes and private tuition, for getting their only son not beaten to a pulp?

Benny she told to butt out. Waiting in the takeout line at Arby's, Mindy said, "Don't take this the wrong way, Benjamin, but you are a weak man. A very weak man and a terrible father." She ordered two beef and cheese sandwiches. The melty kind. Telling Benny, "No offence."

EVEN IF SHE WERE SEEN, WOULD IT LOOK SO BAD TO BE CAUGHT APPARENTLY STILL TRYING TO SAVE HER MARRIAGE WITH FURTIVE SEX?



If she'd managed to hammer anything into Benny's head, it was the fact that he had serious limitations. That he lacked all imagination was chief among them. Their son walks home from school with his eyes beaten purple as two prune Danish, and his nose like a squashed eggplant, and a chipped tooth, his blood all down the front of his shirt, and all this boy's father can say is, "Noah, we'll look into it."

A reaction like that, no father should feel proud of. No, placid Benny could go to his office. Benny could watch the market and type out his buy and sell orders. Starting with the knife at his throat at the Singers' party and her making accusations of rape, it was Mindy who got the ball rolling. As her boy's only mother she was planning to rescue him from further assailment.

What would it hurt if she saw her own situation improve? Why couldn't Noah's salvation throw a little good fortune her way? In the car, she checked for napkins in the bag of Arby's. Folded on top of the hot sandwiches were paper napkins. "Okay, drive," she told Benny.

She lifted a sandwich from the bag and spread a paper napkin across her Bill Blass. "You only have yourself to blame," she said. She talked while chewing, she was so hungry. "I told you not to wear the Perry Ellis."

It was decided theirs would be a marriage in trial separation. What Winchell always called a don'tinvitem. With Mindy renting a cheap studio apartment in the vicinity of Delmar Fields, each day she'd leave the house in Ansel Park, sneaking out early so as not to be seen by Yael Singer. Even if she were seen, would it look so bad to be caught apparently still trying to save her marriage with furtive sex? She'd drive Noah to his new school, then spend her day painting in the apartment. Every afternoon she'd dress up in a uniform from a store that sold uniforms, and leave as if to work the night shift somewhere. She'd eat Arby's melty sandwiches every lunch. Day's end, she'd collect their boy and spend the nights at Ansel Park.

Nights, over the dinner table, Benny would ask, "How's the painting business?"

Noah would be immersed in his Japanese, and she would have a fabled room of her own. That's not to say the Ansel Park house didn't have rooms more than a family of three could use, including the indoor sports court no one ever set foot inside, but a cheap apartment Mindy could move her old college furniture into, her posters and music on compact disc, her paints and easel.

She tried to see the stained grout and splintering cabinet doors the way the future would. The way pilgrims would, as sanctified. Not as shabby, but as a place a revolutionary artist had set out to conquer the world. Mindy Brume's garret. The scuttling brown spot along the baseboard, be it a small mouse or a mammoth cockroach, it only added to her street credibility. Future scholars would marvel over this chipped paint. Lead-based paint. Brain damage waiting to happen. In this neighbourhood of fetal alcohol everything.

The edges of asbestos tile peeled up from the cracked concrete floor. To think so many future masterpieces would be painted in the presence of these spiders. That made her think of *Charlotte's Web*. And that, those spiders, made her smell the barbecue from the Arby's down the block.

After a fascinating morning spent applying for social welfare benefits and sketching her fellow applicants, who should she meet but her next-door neighbour. In the parking lot, he was, the neighbour. Crawling out from under a car. He smelled, but like a soft cheese, like one of the very expensive artisan cheeses, like the free-trade ones packaged afloat in sterile urine sealed within a food-grade pig bladder. Like her Unka always said that she couldn't remember, but that translated to "A nose is the best judge of character in buying eels."

The stranger popped a beer and handed it to her.

Mindy took a swig. Looked at the can. "I really shouldn't be drinking."

He asked, "Are you expecting a baby?" No male model, his beer belly stretched the front of his T-shirt. Fat he looked, but in that way that made a grown woman feel more feminine. Where the T-shirt rode up in front, his skin showed. Scars were all it was, that skin. Little red train tracks like from staples, like

from surgery after being gutted by a land mine Shiny, red train tracks crisscrossing his belly

Mindy laughed. Took another swig. Shook her head. Beer for lunch. She was already blending in.

Dripping plastic faucets and overloaded aluminum wiring that made every light switch feel warm to the touch. She pictured Georgia O'Keeffe in her adobe hut communing with rattlesnakes. Emily Dickinson in her sooty attic isolation.

'So you're not pregnant?" Her neighbour wasn't convinced. She raised the can in a toast. She reached across the space between them, took him around the wrist and twisted until she could see his watch. "Not since ," she noted the time, "two hours ago." His wrist felt solid and hairy. She twisted, and he let himself be twisted by scrawny, weak her.

Still, he didn't understand.

"I'm pro-choice, but I didn't get to choose," she stressed. "My old man...." She let her voice trail off.

He looked away as if embarrassed or ashamed on her behalf.

throat. "This isn't my real voice."

Maybe he'd buy that she was a sex worker. Daytime she'd be at the apartment, winding down. Nighttimes she implied she spent screwing some monied power broker or a captain of industry. This lie would make the imperfect lie about being a waitress perfect.

Everyone living in the complex, they were a refugee from something. Somewhere.

His listening was a pit she kept falling into. Or it was a hole she wanted to fill with her words. She told him she'd contracted gonorrhoea in her mouth one time and had let it go too long, and after that she had this voice, different than before, deeper on account of her vocal cords being scarred. It was a test. She was shit testing him. The stranger never looked away or flinched. Because he was unfazed or because of the language barrier, she wasn't certain.

Gonorrhoea wasn't likely the first word they taught in ESL so talking to him felt nice, relaxed, like talking to a nice dog, like a retired pit bull, you could fantasize having reckless afternoon sex with. The exact words with sticks or what?"

Noah sighed. The only way to describe such a sigh was as a confessional sigh. As if the jig was up. "You remember Natasha?" he asked.

Mindy didn't.

"She was sort of with me," he said.

The angel he meant.

"She transferred to Delmar." Not to mince words, but their Noah had beat himself to his own pulp. That's the genius they'd raised. From behind, somebody honked. Mindy hadn't realised she'd slowed to a crawl. To let everyone pass she pulled to the curb. "You did a very good job." Nurturing she tried to sound, that's instead of shocked. Then as if just curious, she asked, "How'd you do it?" Noah's method had been to stand in their indoor sports court and throw a basketball against the concrete wall, close his eyes and step into its return path. A mouth guard, he wore, like from boxing. God bless him. For smaller bruises he'd catch a racquetball in the face.

When Benny got home and found Mindy

SHE REMEMBERED THE WOMEN TURNED INTO MEN MADE FAMOUS BY DISCARDED WOMEN.

She pressed on, "He didn't want it." She took a long draw on the beer can, then forced a tragic smile for her fake dead baby.

This would become the pattern of her days. She'd leave Ansel Park each morning and drop Noah at his new magnet school. A kiln, they offered. Portuguese immersion. A person could do worse. All that, and Noah had tested as the smartest from his cohort. While he was in school, she'd pretend to live at the apartment. Noah, Mister High and Mighty, he wouldn't show his face at the apartment, he hated the place so much. Chess Club he took after school, and Rocket Club, to help his college applications but actually to avoid the spiders and her painting him. The rent she paid didn't compare to the tuition they saved by fake-living in the district. Being fake-trial separated. Headed for fake-divorce due to faked domestic abuse.

Mindy was trying on a new her. This neighbour was the mirror she watched herself reflected in. She saw the way he must see her. With her French manicure and waxed legs. Vassar written all over her. She cleared her didn't matter.

She looked at his scarred gut. Looked long enough to let him see that she was looking. Someone had tortured this man cruelly and Mindy kept waiting for that cruelty to surface in him.

She remembered Gauguin's bare-breasted Tahitian women. Toulouse-Lautrec's ghastly parlour-house whores. All the women turned into art by men and then forgotten. All the men made famous by discarded women. Under the sun his pale face had darkened and his dark hair had lightened until they were the same red-brown. A detail maybe no one except a true artist would note. All of those forgotten women she would avenge. He would be her muse. Like a Bridges of Madison County type situation only with her as the savvy artist and him as the dim-witted foreigner. That seemed like progress as these things went. Trust her, he didn't, not to date.

She needed his trust.

That evening in the car, driving home with Noah, she asked, "Those boys who hit you? How did they hit you?" She added, "I mean, with both eyes blackened and a swelling on her forehead so tight it looked to split the skin, that and a fat lip, with racquetball bruises on her neck and collarbones, she assured him it was just to keep up appearances.

To placate him she brought up how much she'd be getting in food stamps and rent assistance.

The government was practically paying them to send Noah to a better school. On Ivan, the bruises did the trick. His name was Ivan, her neighbour. He accepted her life as a prostitute brimming with diseases and still kissed her hurt mouth. He seemed to appreciate that she wasn't starved to prison camp thinness. Not like that Myra from yoga everyone said was so perfect. Ivan would lay claim to big handfuls of her and marvel over her skin. Beautiful she was, merely by not being scarred by barbed wire and dog bites. His smell she got acclimated to, and he wore a fresh condom every time without her having to ask which put him a notch above Benny on the gentleman scale.

Such a man she'd never met. Ivan wept

over her bruises. Kissed them, he did and swore to end the life of the whoremonger who beat her so savagely. A *Fifty Shades of Grey* situation it was, except she had to beat herself. This too seemed like progress as gender relations went.

Noah on the contrary, her genius, shaped up to be her problem child. Driving back to the house one night he announced that his angel, his Natasha, her parents had relocated to Burien. Such a gifted, talented boy he was, Noah wanted to transfer back to Ansel Park. Forget the kiln and Japanese immersion. This, after Ivan had bought her a car, a Ford, so a prostitute riding the bus she'd stop having to be. Such a romantic, that Ivan. Driving her clunker Ford back to Ansel Park, she asked Noah, "You want I should tell your father you beat yourself?"

It sounded dirty, but he knew what she meant.

What she didn't say was how proud she felt. Her Noah hadn't inherited his father's talent for lousy acting. Benny with his always smiling, Benny couldn't hold a

ART BY MEN AND THEN FORGOTTEN. THE ALL OF THOSE WOMEN SHE WOULD AVENGE.

candle to Ivan in the sack. But as her Unka was fond of saying, not that she could remember, but in English it came out as, "No good eel doesn't get stale."

Not that she told Noah, but she was glad to be fake-reconciling from her fake-separation for fake-spousal abuse. She'd only ever told Ivan her name was Liana. Her crap from college, the Ford he'd bought, she could walk away from. Simply leave the keys on the apartment counter and pull the door shut, locked behind her. Ivan wouldn't have a clue where to look.

Their last afternoon in the sack, Mindy looked around at the mildew. Her way to say good-bye was by giving Ivan an Arby's sandwich they could share in a bed she'd never have to make. Dirty sheets she would leave behind. Disappear she would, step into her Jil Sander slacks and catch the bus to her fake sex workplace. She'd told Ivan the Ford was idling rough, dying at stoplights, so he'd hauled out his toolbox to make repairs. Not the truth, Mindy's story, but reason enough to abandon the car. Give it a week, two weeks,

Benny, that Benny, he had her going. He truly did, the way he put both hands over his throat and hot Chinese mustard from Williams-Sonoma came gushing out between his fingers. But gallons it was, pouring out. Red-brown mustard that must cost a fortune, it was so much, especially for Benny who'd obviously spared no expense to teach her a lesson. Of course he'd hired this Ivan person, who most likely was mowing someone's lawn in Ansel Park and who wouldn't say no, not if it meant getting paid to screw Mindy and get Benny's revenge for the brisket at the Singers' party. As if this time his throat was really cut, except it looked so fake.

Benny was that kind of petty, he was. All this pettiness just to prove he could act.

From the window Mindy watched her husband sink to his knees. His eyes, he was making the same slaughterhouse eyes he'd made with the brisket knife. Whatever secret apparatus he'd rigged it was pumping tons, yes tons of expensive Chinese mustard into the gravel, and he pretended to topple forward. Fake gasping with Chinese mustard

and the landlord would show Ivan the unit with her uniforms hanging in the closet, her dirty Arby's bag on the counter while she'd be vanished Amelia Earhart-style.

Right during sex someone came *honkhonking*, some car, into the parking lot.

From the window she looked to see Benny pull in. Benjamin, who'd collected Noah from his last day at Delmar Fields. Happy smiling like a dog he was. Like a golden something dog, he stepped out of his car and called up to her window, "So this is where you live? What a dump!"

Before she could answer, Ivan happened. Tell Benny to run, she wanted to, but Ivan burst out of the apartment door wearing only boxer shorts and his scars. Ivan snatched up something from his open toolbox beside the fake-broken-down Ford. The whatever tool it was, Ivan ran up and backhanded Benny with it. Swatted Benny across the face. One of those knives it was, like from cutting carpets with a sliding out razor blade. Mindy could see because Ivan flung the knife away and disappeared sprinting down the street.

gurgling from both corners of his wide-open mouth. Pretend twitching, facedown in the gravel, he was, while from the apartment window Mindy filmed with her camera phone and shouted, "Bravo, Benjamin Brume!" And, "You're not fooling anyone, mister!"

And like maybe they took acting lessons together, but their Noah jumped out of the car in slow motion and fell, skidded and fell in his hurry, crawling across sharp gravel on his hands and knees he did. Noah crawled to his father to fake a tourniquet around his father's neck using only his bare hands, shouting, "Dad! Don't die, Dad!" even as they're both hamming it up in a flood of Chinese mustard.

Yael Singer, Mindy half expected to jump out from behind a tree, this looked so phoney. The Goldblatts and the Futters and that Myra, all watching to see Mindy get what's coming to her. With sirens, yes ambulance sirens even her Benny had paid to come screaming closer and closer for added realism. Benny who'd thought of everything, such a stage manager he was. Her Benjamin, whom she'd married and given a son, and who rewarded her by

fake-going limp in the arms of their Noah in the dirty parking lot all because of her ruining his favourite Perry Ellis.

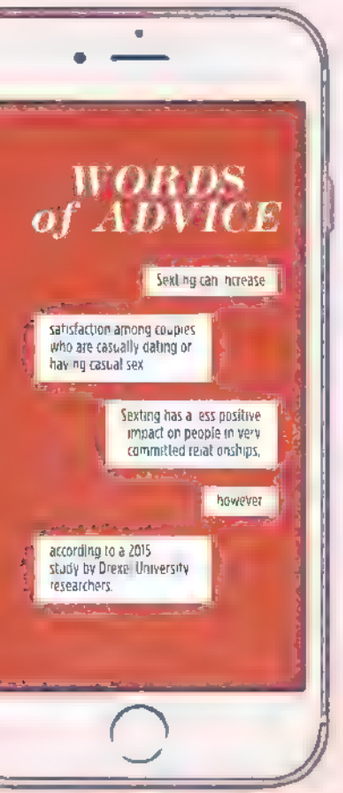
A little embarrassed Mindy felt now about how loose she'd got, how soft and loose she'd got so fast with this hired Ivan. That shill, Ivan, she'd wanted him so bad. Well, the joke was on her. Hah ha! And like something else she couldn't remember, it came to mind. More immigrant wisdom, but when her Unka said it, the words came out "To a liar the whole world looks like a lie."

Well the joke, the final punch line would be Benjamin Brume, double hah-ha, because he'd never know to laugh. And such a joke! Her monthly period Mindy hadn't had in six weeks. It could be more, maybe, but playacting Benny, her playing dead husband would be raising the child of his hired Ivan.

The scope of his routine, not to mention the expense, all to humiliate her, Mindy Brume. She stood in the apartment window looking down, she did, then put aside filming and started to clap her hands. But very slowly. ■

DIRTY TALK

The way we speak about sex has always been, shall we say, nuanced. Here, our Playboy Advisor offers a study of numbers and nomenclature related to the lewdest lexicon in the English language **(No offence)**


WORDS of ADVICE
Sexting can increase
satisfaction among couples who are casually dating or having casual sex
Sexting has a less positive impact on people in very committed relationships,
however
according to a 2015 study by Drexel University researchers.

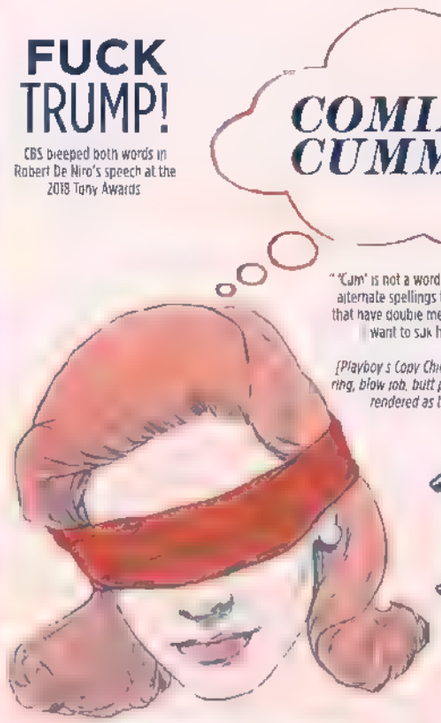
Sneeze in her satchel
Great Depression–era slang for cunnilingus

Icing expert
World War II–era slang for blow job enthusiast

Eating pound cake
World War II–era slang for analingus

FUCK TRUMP!

CBS bleeped both words in Robert De Niro's speech at the 2018 Tony Awards



COMING or CUMMING?

"'Cum' is not a word. We don't have three-letter alternate spellings for other four-letter words that have double meanings. You wouldn't write 'I want to suk his d'k.'" —Dan Savage

[Playboy's Copy Chief agrees, in addition, cock ring, blow job, butt plug and doggy style are all rendered as two words, not one

14TH CENTURY

widely accepted date of fuck's first publication

1664

first printed reference to pussy in a sexual context

DON'T SAY A WORD

RED PINEAPPLE **VANILLA**
UNICORN **KELLY CLARKSON** HUFFLEPUFF

terms listed in a 2018 survey of the most popular safe words used during kinky sex, as reported by sex-toy maker Lovehoney

4.1 MILLION

number of Google search results for "cum-a-holic"

CUNT 5 WAYS

GROPECUNTELANE a street name in London's supposed red-light district, circa 1230

KUNTA Cunt's Old Nordic origin word, meaning women's genitals, per the Oxford English Dictionary

KUNTHI Sanskrit for female genitalia

KUNTI paternal aunt of the Hindu god Krishna

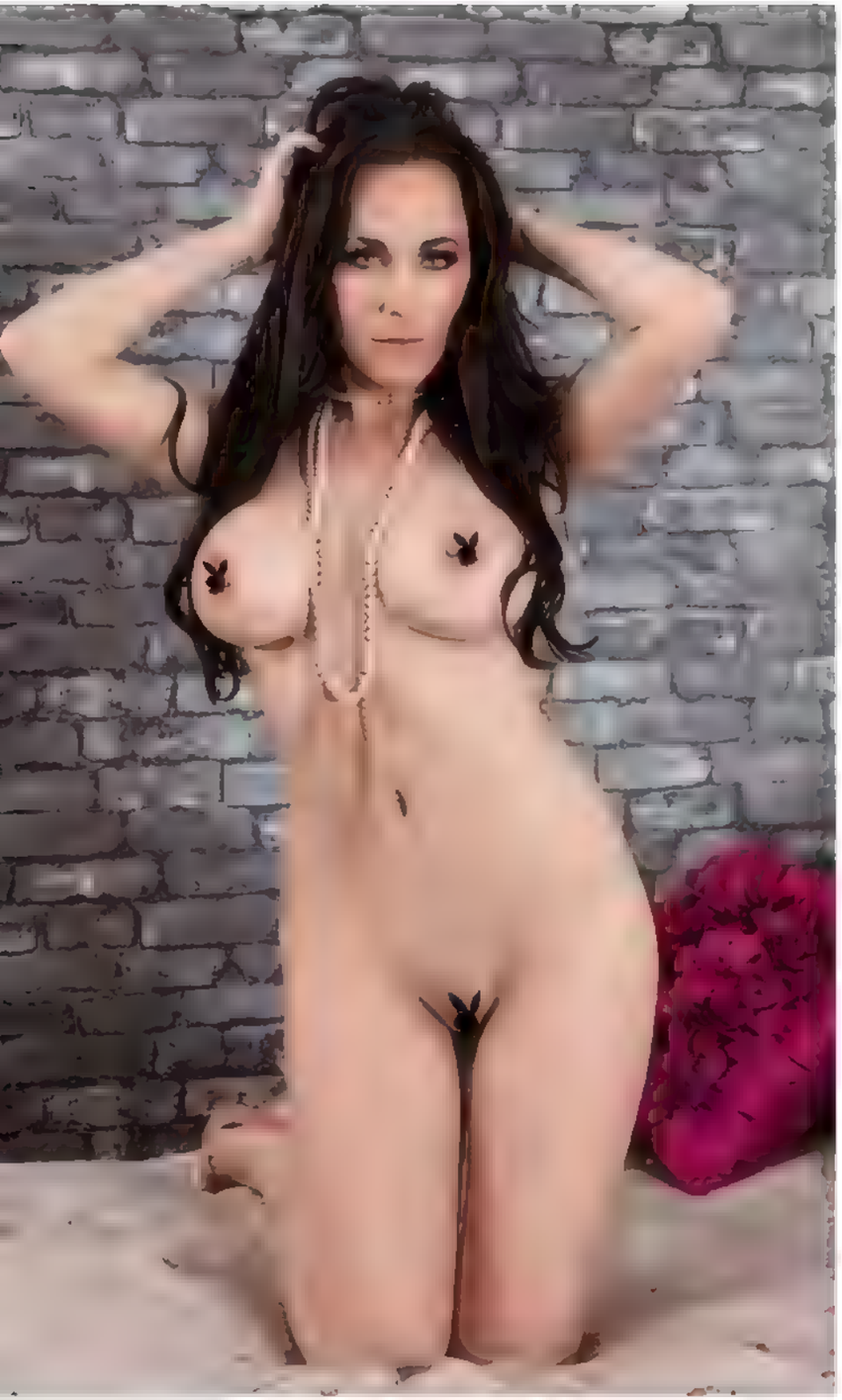
"GUESS THAT **CUNT** GETTING EATEN" – lyrics in Azealia Banks's 2011 hit "212"

BY **ANNA DEL GAIZO**
ILLUSTRATIONS BY **SARAH MAXWELL**

"I never know what to do with myself at these events."

DANIELLE PAIGE

Photography by **BRUCE COLERO**



Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
've been excited to shoot for p ayboy s nce turned 18

Tell us something surprising about you.
scuba d ve with sharks

Describe yourself in one sentence.
'm rea y funny and 'm always making peop e la.ugh.

What are some of your hobbies?
ove to do yoga, sing and dance

What is your biggest turn on?
Somebody that s rea y smart

What turns you off the most?
A man that doesn't walk you to your door

Describe to us your perfect date.
Dinner and a mov e. Then wa king and ta king after

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Aging .. haha .

Any last words you would like to share with your readers.
Never stop be eving in yourself Always go for your dreams And a ways do t for yourse f. Nobody e se

PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: SAM HARRIS

A candid conversation with the scientist, humanist and (depending on whom you ask) intellectual Dark Web overlord on American orthodoxies, religious and secular, liberal and conservative

At a moment when public discourse seems increasingly split between the virtue-signalling left and the dog whistling right, Sam Harris inhabits what some call the radical centre. A philosopher, neuroscientist, critic of religion and defender of controversial thinkers under siege, he is more or less equally dubious of Donald Trump, Islamic fundamentalism, identity politics and liberal sanctimony. If you believe deeply in something — from God to Kanye — chances are Harris has a pin to pop your balloon.

The New York Times last year lumped Harris in with a rising band of outsider pundits dubbed the "Intellectual Dark Web" alongside such high-minded provocateurs as psychologist Jordan Peterson, mathematician Eric Weinstein and Daily Wire founder Ben Shapiro. Aside from being mostly white men, they have little in common other than assorted eyebrow raising opinions that arguably keep them locked out of mainstream media and academia. Screw affirmative action! Bring on stricter border control! Multiculturalism sucks! Harris dismisses the whole alliance as kind of a joke.

With his 2004 best seller *The End of Faith*, Harris found himself part of another group of agitators, the so-called Four Horsemen, a loose affiliation of atheists including Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and the late Christopher Hitchens. In his 2010 book *The Moral Landscape*, Harris argues that science is the key (the only one, really) to understanding morality and well being. Promoting 2014's *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion on HBO's Real Time With Bill Maher*, he argued to a beet faced, table pounding Ben Affleck that radical Islam is a global menace. The actor accused Harris of being "gross" and "racist", Harris later said Affleck was likely roided up from his latest Batman gig.

A student of Buddhism and meditation, Harris rides through such rages with unnerving equanimity, as in a 2018 public showdown with Vox.com founder Ezra Klein on the debate around race and IQ. In a nutshell, Harris said there could be a link, Klein called that theory racist. (Klein himself sat for a Playboy Interview, with the same writer who spoke with Harris, for our May/June 2017 issue.) "To Harris," Klein said in a follow up post, "identity politics is something others do. To me, it's something we all do, and that he and many others refuse to admit they're doing. This is one of the advantages of being the majority group. Your concerns get coded as concerns, it's everyone else who is playing identity politics."

But whether or not you agree with Klein, it's hard to deny that Harris's priority and passion is the exploration of big and maybe unanswerable questions. Is there such a thing as objective moral truth? Are some values more valuable than others? And where does the dizzying advance of technology factor in?

Samuel Benjamin Harris was born on April 9, 1967 in Los Angeles. He won't confirm many personal details, citing family security concerns, but he is happy to reveal that he first experimented with MDMA while he was a student at Stanford University and that he experienced a spiritual epiphany. He left Stanford midway to study mysticism and Eastern religions in Asia, returning to get a degree in philosophy in 2000. He later received a Ph.D. in neuroscience from UCLA.

These days Harris is among a new breed of public intellectual. Unattached to any particular institution, platform or even doctrine, he lectures, writes and tweets wherever his millions of followers show up to listen. His award-winning *Waking Up* podcast is in its eighth year, and January marks the debut of a new series, *Experiments in Conversation*, involving a range of leading thinkers and a live audience. Harris is married to Annaka Harris, a mindfulness teacher and author of the children's book *I Wonder*; they have two daughters.

PLAYBOY Contributing Editor **David Hochman**, who last interviewed Planned Parenthood's Cecile Richards for the magazine, spent a Saturday afternoon with Harris in West Hollywood. Dressed in a button down shirt, dark blazer and jeans ("picture Ben Stiller as your dissertation advisor," Hochman says), Harris was Zen calm but ready to rile.

"Sam is a true intellectual product of our moment," Hochman says. "He's like a walking version of the internet, except without the annoying video buffering and pop up ads. He harbours no regrets but admits to imbuing some of his arguments with 'a little too much topspin.' He can come off serious at first, but once he gets rolling, he's dazzling as a thinker who's fearless in his beliefs and also quite persuasive. He'll present an idea on culture, politics or sex that makes you go, 'Wait — no, no.' But hear him out and you often find yourself thinking, Okay, I see your point. So it made sense to start with a question about the points that people tend to miss."

PLAYBOY: For a mild mannered guy, you inspire an unusual amount of controversy with your views, whether it's suggesting that IQ might differ across races and ethnic groups, supporting the use of torture or saying you would get rid of religion before getting rid of rape. What do people get wrong about you?

HARRIS: I'm interested in how we think about problems and how we can talk about them, right? My interest in the thing I'm talking about is often one level removed from the thing I'm actually talking about. It's like a meta level of interest, but I'm being mistaken as somebody who is just really interested in that thing. Let's take torture. My interest is not in torture per se. I'm interested in ethical bedrock. Now, to even entertain the efficacy of torture brands you as a moral monster, but the cost of doing business in times of war demands that we get it right. In ethical terms, the collateral damage of dropping bombs could be far worse than, say, a case of justifiable waterboarding. The same goes for the conversation about race and IQ. My interest is not in measuring intelligence, much less measuring differences in intelligence between groups. I have zero interest in that. I am concerned about the free speech implications of where we're going with all this and the fact that people like the political scientist Charles Murray are being de-platformed in the pursuit of intellectual honesty on the subject.

The example I often use is, if we want to get to ethical bedrock, we should be able to say things like "Why can't you eat babies? There are sometimes extra babies in the world, and they're full of protein. Can't we eat them?" This is not a conversation about eating babies, this is a conversation about how you can close the door to this idea that we both recognise as repellent and why we recognise it that way. But there are people out there who will say, "Hey, Sam Harris is that guy who wonders why we can't eat babies."

PLAYBOY: Or the guy who once wrote, "It's difficult to imagine a set of beliefs more suggestive of mental illness than those that lie at the heart of many of our religious traditions."

HARRIS: You can always find a case where it's hard to see the downside to somebody's religiosity if it's innocuous, if it's not linked up with any political program that's going to impose misery on other people or infringe on their rights. But an understanding of the world that is based on the infallible word of God requires a kind of willful ignorance — bordering on madness—of history, science, common sense and human decency. For true believers it's not just "It makes me feel good to pray" or "Honour thy father and thy mother." They also believe things about the status of gay people or, in the extreme case, what should happen to people who don't believe as they do. They apply biblical thinking to wildly complex modern problems. Climate change? That's not something you need to worry about when you're waiting for the Messiah. Granted, there are wonderful people who are helped by their religion in some local circumstances. I would never dispute that. I would simply say that there are rational alternatives that don't link up with anything that's divisive with respect to a modern understanding of the world. In fact, I think this problem of religious sectarianism is fuelling the energy of partisanship that's so strong right now in politics and elsewhere.

"Your points trump other points, and that's one reason we're so politically dysfunctional. The left eats itself in a way that the right doesn't."

"You should be able to come back from anything as long as you can show the path you took that has made you a different person."

"It wasn't until I took MDMA that I realised there are states of consciousness that explain somebody like Jesus."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CHRISTOPHER PATEY**

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PLAYBOY: So our cultural divide is not a problem of left versus right?

HARRIS: Even when it's not religious, we divide ourselves into religious sects. You've picked your house of worship and it's very hard to see what's wrong with your unshakable faith. And of course it's all too easy to see what's wrong with the other side, so you get into us versus them versus them versus them, and it never ends.

PLAYBOY: Do you see a pathway to some sort of unity in the Trump era?

HARRIS: I think there are moves to make, which most people now decline, that could make the national conversation infinitely more productive — for instance, by not attacking the straw man version of your opponent's argument as opposed to what we now call "steel-manning" their argument. You see straw manning on Twitter every second, and it's led by Trump. People attack your position by misrepresenting your argument, thereby defeating it. Steel manning is much rarer. It's when you restate your opponent's position in a way that he or she can't find fault with. Your account might even improve their position. "I'm prochoice and you're pro life. Let me tell you why I think you're pro life, and why you're opposed to abortion." At which point the person says, "You said it better than I could." Then you can make an argument against that. That's the only place to start. You have to do the work to understand the other person's point of view. But that's almost never done.

Something I deal with a lot is what I call "leftist mind reading," where people pretend to understand your view or your motives better than you do. So no matter what you say, they engage in a game of telepathy — actually pseudo-telepathy — telling you what you believe even if it's not accurate.

PLAYBOY: You're frequently called out by the left for criticising Islam.

HARRIS: As a set of ideas, the link between Islam as a religion and suicidal terrorism worries me. But the person on the left who has taken issue with that will say, "Well, actually, you're just racist. You don't like people from the Middle East." Or, "You were born Jewish, and you're just caught up in your own identity politics." God forbid you utter something that's susceptible to the worst possible interpretation, and they'll hold you to that interpretation no matter what else you say. There's no room for "That came out wrong" or "That's not exactly what I meant." In public dialogue today, there's no way to take your foot out of your mouth. There's a lack of charity in these conversations, coming from both sides, where people want to hold each other in this very litigious way to the worst possible reading of whatever they say. Or worse still, they'll lift something out of context to such a degree that it can be reasonably understood to have the exact opposite meaning of what you intended. This is how you score points in the new economy of reputation assault. Any blow you can land, you should land.

PLAYBOY: But why don't these assaults work on Trump himself? The blows don't land. Call him bigoted or sexist or corrupt and his base ratchets up the support.

HARRIS: This has been mysterious to many of us. Trump has managed to gather an audience of people who do not care about all the ways in which he's obviously a morally damaged person. There's something sociopathic about him. He's just malignantly selfish, he lies with a frequency and velocity we have never seen in public life. It's not just that he lies, he is fundamentally hostile to the truth. Most liars lie in a way that pays respect to the norm of truth-telling so as to be undetected. They insert the lie in the logical spot where the piece would complete the puzzle. Trump doesn't care about the puzzle. He lies and then contradicts himself two seconds later. If it gets pointed out, no problem, he just keeps moving forward, and something like tens of millions of grownups in the country, according to polls, still think Trump can do no wrong.

Even when it's not religious, we divide ourselves into religious sects.

PLAYBOY: Explain the neuroscience around giving Trump that pass.

HARRIS: Trump comes out of a space in the brain that doesn't represent reality. It's the same space that draws people to professional wrestling. Trump's base doesn't care whether Russia hacked the election; they just like watching the wrecking ball. For the most part, these are people who think the system has screwed them, so any change is something to cheer. That's an intuition I can understand. If your life is terrible and you locate the source of that misery — the media, immigrants, Nancy Pelosi — then disorder from a guy like Trump just feels like it rerolls the dice. Things can only go up from miserable, right?

PLAYBOY: There's some overlap between Trump's base and yours. Right wing meme lords love you and your cohorts in the Intellectual Dark Web.

HARRIS: First of all, I'm not even sure I could name who is in this so-called IDW. I mean, there are people who occasionally get mentioned as being in it whom I've never heard of or wouldn't want to be associated with. But the core people — Jordan Peterson, Joe Rogan, evolutionary theorist Bret Weinstein and his brother, Eric, who coined the term — are people I enjoy having conversations with. To me it's a tongue-in-cheek concept that others are more attached to than I am.

The response to it is informatively deranged, because it has been attacked not just as right-wing but as a fascist cabal like right of right. And yet I believe virtually everyone in the group is centre or left of centre or even well left of centre. I would put myself at left of center. Someone like Bret Weinstein is as left as you can get on every topic. The only actual conservative I can think of is Ben Shapiro, and Ben and I disagree about almost everything. He's an Orthodox Jew, he's not in favour of gay marriage, and he questions climate change. But he's committed to the same rules of intellectual honesty and to the same principles of charity with regard to other people's positions. And yeah, some of my views and criticisms can definitely be attractive to certain people on the right who are looking to put another arrow in their quiver, but those people certainly can't listen or read for very long before they become uncomfortable with the other things that I believe.

PLAYBOY: You believe liberals are too soft on defending America's borders.

HARRIS: National borders make sense. Open borders would be a catastrophe. The moment you admit that you want borders, then you need a real information system that tracks everyone who comes across those borders, because you don't want to let in jihadis. You don't want to let in people carrying Ebola from a trip abroad. You need to know where people have been and why they were there and who they are, down to whether they have their vaccinations. And all of this, in principle, is coercive: It's backed up by guns. There's somebody standing there with a gun who is not going to let you jump the turnstile at passport control. Now, on the left, nobody wants to hear this. They basically say, "You are a racist asshole if you want to keep any one out." And if that is the view on questions like that, I think we're guaranteed four more years of Trump, because at least half of our society has run out of patience with that.

PLAYBOY: How can the left get its groove back?

HARRIS: We have to become decoupled from identity politics and political correctness. There's this growing assumption that you can voice a strong opinion about a segment of the population only if you are part of that segment. If I'm a white guy and the conversation turns to the topic of race and violence, it would be considered unseemly for me to offer a solution to the problem of crime in Chicago. That's insane. The shootings in Chicago are just off the charts, it's a war zone. Whatever the solution is, it likely has to do with generic enough factors of sociology and economics and policing that people should be able to talk about it regardless of the colour of their skin. Whatever is true is true, and let the best idea win. But the idea that you have no standing to talk about these excruciating social problems unless you've personally suffered them? In fact, that's exactly backward. If you have personally suffered these things, very likely you're not the best person to talk about them. That's what we mean by bias. As a survivor of rape, only I can talk about rape. Well, no, as a survivor of rape, let's talk about how traumatised you've been by rape, and then we get into a very different conversation. Social policy is probably not best engineered by people who are so close to the problem that it has destroyed their lives. It's all they can think about. They have no other perspective. They don't want to hear another perspective.

PLAYBOY: Isn't the point to give voice to social groups that have been traditionally silenced or marginalised because of their race, gender, religion, oppression and so on?

HARRIS: The problem is that public discourse is turning into an exercise in confirmation bias. With identity politics, you find your side of the argument and silo yourself in. It has become a kind of victimology that I describe as the unhappiest game of Dungeons & Dragons. You and all your people have these victim points in a sort of grievance Olympics. Your points trump other points, and that's one reason we're so politically dysfunctional. The left eats itself in a way that the right doesn't. If someone makes the slightest misstep, they're destroyed by the left wing mob that is more woke than they are. There are literally cases of a Latina feminist lesbian professor not being woke enough for her students because she wants to keep teaching the classical Western canon. And this person essentially gets burned as a witch for not being left of left of left of left.

PLAYBOY: Do you see any downside to the #MeToo movement?

HARRIS: I'm 100 percent in favour of the core of the #MeToo movement. There are guys who have been behaving terribly, rapists and criminals who should be in prison. And then there's this other area of intolerable sexual harassment and crudeness for which there has traditionally not been much of a sanction. Now there is, and that's all good, right?

PLAYBOY: Is there a but?

HARRIS: But there's a lot of confusing stuff to work out. Where are the boundaries? What's the difference between somebody with Asperger's who just doesn't know how to flirt and somebody who's a scary harasser? That could be difficult to sort out in an office. We're still trying to navigate in this space, but I'm worried that the totally rational, ethical, defensible subset of concerns here is now an island in a sea of moral panic that's going to do immense harm to good people.

I'm not even sure I could name who is in the IDW. To me it's a tongue-in-cheek concept.

There are the monsters on one side, where we have Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein. They belong in prison. But then we've got Al Franken, who maybe is guilty of something worth worrying about, but it's definitely not what the first guys did. And then over here we have Aziz Ansari, where it's not even clear that this was anything other than a bad date. Things get more innocuous still when somebody makes a joke that two years ago everyone would have laughed at, and now this person's worried about their career. Matt Damon said clearly that we have to make these distinctions, and for that he experienced a tsunami of pushback, which ended with him apologising: "I'm not going to say anything more about this ever again." Right. I mean, if Matt Damon isn't secure enough in his career to not have to apologise for a completely reasonable thing, we have a problem, because he should be unsinkable.

Or let's look at Louis C.K., one of the funniest comics we've ever had, who's now dealing with #MeToo accusations. I think he was unlucky in the timing. Everyone was viewing his situation through the lens of Harvey Weinstein.

PLAYBOY: Several women accused Louis C.K. of masturbating in their presence. Isn't this another case of a celebrated male thinking that when you're a star you're allowed to do anything?

HARRIS: Well, unless there's something I don't understand about Louis C.K.'s situation, it seems nobody was coerced and nobody felt they couldn't leave the room. Yes, the problem comes when there's a power imbalance. The worst situation would be if he tried to do something to harm somebody's career or discourage them from talking. That would be nefarious. But if you're just talking about a guy who's got this masturbation fetish and he's asking people if he can masturbate in front of them and they say yes and he does it, that's a world away from what is alleged about Harvey Weinstein. So then what happens to someone like Louis C.K.? Starve to death and never work again?

PLAYBOY: Do you think Roseanne should still have a TV job after her tweet last year comparing black Obama aide Valerie Jarrett to an ape?

HARRIS: There it's harder. There are so many variables. Roseanne clearly was dealing with some mental health issues, popping Ambien all the time. If you saw her conversation in the aftermath with Joe Rogan you know she's dealing with lots of chaos. You don't know exactly whose thumbs were on her phone. She also claimed quite credibly that she didn't even know Valerie Jarrett was black. Like, if you google Valerie Jarrett and look at the photos that come up, it's not entirely obvious she's black. That's plausible. For me, strangely, the racism here is in the mind of the person interpreting the tweet. It's like, okay, so you're saying that black people look like apes? That's how you're going to read this? Because if Roseanne called her a horse, I think we wouldn't be having this conversation.

PLAYBOY: But there are tropes in our culture that signify deeper meaning. There's a history of African Americans being compared to apes and monkeys.

HARRIS: But that wasn't necessarily what was in the mind of Roseanne at that moment. Or let's look at what happened with Megyn Kelly getting fired by NBC. I don't know Megyn Kelly; I don't know what her actual beliefs are, but she tried to have a conversation about Halloween and why you can't go out in blackface. She said, "When I was a kid, you could paint your face if you wanted and go out as Diana Ross." Apparently she didn't know that statement was

radioactive. The term *blackface* didn't link up in her mind with minstrel shows and all this other stuff in our culture we're right to be very critical of. She just meant that if you're dressing up as a character, light- or dark-skinned, why can't you put makeup on to make yourself look like that character? That should absolutely be something we're able to talk about on television. And you either have a good argument or you don't. Kelly can then say, "No, that's not what I meant. It's horrible. The racism, the KKK. I disavow all of that." Instead it becomes "You said you're okay with blackface!" Even with a hostage-style apology, Megyn Kelly was doomed, which I think is wrong. I think in principle you should be able to come back from anything as long as you can show the path you took that has made you a different person. We need to have a better process for this. People who were murderers or neo-Nazis can talk about how they're different now, and that becomes valuable in deprogramming other people.

PLAYBOY: What about all these fallen priests accused of being paedophiles?

HARRIS: That's a super hard case. Paedophilia presumably has some neurological underpinning that we don't yet understand. It's interesting to notice that if we did understand its genetics and its neuroanatomy, then we could cure it, right? Maybe it turns out that every paedophile you've ever met has this special case of epilepsy, and if we could just zap this one part of the temporal lobes, they would be done. They might be gay, they might be straight, maybe they don't like kids, but they feel the exact same way about paedophilia that you do, which is that it's bad. We've got to solve that problem. Then we could just treat people and there would be no moral judgment at all.

But because we're not there, we have this hugely moralistic way of thinking about it. In the case of the Catholic Church you have an institution that is cynically protecting its reputation by moving these people from parish to parish, knowing they're going to revictimise kids. You've got an institution with billions of dollars suing people into silence. The church is bankrupting people who they know are legitimate victims, trying to discredit them on the witness stand and then gloating about their success. We have their files where they say, "We won even though we knew the cases to be legitimate." It's the quintessence of evil.

PLAYBOY: By the way, do you remember the moment when you determined that God doesn't exist?

HARRIS: Growing up, I was an atheist who didn't know I was an atheist. I just thought religion was a sham and it was rather crazy people, epileptics or liars who had managed to give birth to these institutions. I had read Bertrand Russell but didn't know anything about organised atheism in the United States. Madalyn Murray O'Hair [founder of American Atheists] was not a name I would have recognised. But I was raised in a secular household where there was no talk of religion. I remember in my Great Works class at Stanford, which you had to take freshman year, we read the Bible. I remember haranguing the teacher: With all the great books we could read, why are we reading Leviticus? This is not the best of anything. It's not the best philosophy, it's not the best writing. It's just ancient rigmarole that shouldn't be informing our lives.

PLAYBOY: Whoever wrote the Bible should get at least some credit for a best seller that has been charting for thousands of years. Don't those stories matter?

HARRIS: The Bible is just an accident of history. All these religious texts are just books that survived. I mean, someone had to win. We've got Plato, Socrates and Aristotle too, but does that mean they were the three best minds of that generation in Athens? Well, not necessarily. There could have been three other people who just didn't get written about or whose books burned in the fire at Alexandria. It's just historical contingency how we got what we got, and rather than fixate on that legacy, we should be equipping ourselves to produce the best ideas that we can. There are good parts of the Bible, things worth keeping. The Golden Rule is good. Let's keep that. But that appeared in other places too.

The universe may not care about us, but it's not out to get us. The sky really is the limit.

I mean, the flip side of this is you have to imagine how good a book could be if it were actually written by an omniscient person or deity. Forget omniscience even. If you and I decided today to write something and then broadcast it back 2,000 years, we could easily write something that would be miraculous had it been written 2,000 years ago. But there's nothing like that in the Bible. All we would need to do is put in a paragraph about what we currently know about light and its relationship to electricity, what we currently know about the biological basis of inheritance and DNA, and you could see in a single paragraph that it was a miracle. If someone finds that tomorrow in an urn written in Aramaic, that would prove that the source was a supernatural author. Otherwise we could be doing this with Harry Potter.

PLAYBOY: How did taking ecstasy in college change your view of the divine?

HARRIS: It wasn't until I took MDMA that I realised there are states of consciousness, like the one I just spent six hours experiencing, that explain somebody like Jesus and what it was like to be bowled over by being with him. And that's how you could get a religion or a cult. It didn't reset my views about the veracity of revelation, but it completely changed my sense of what the project was in terms of living a good life, because I knew I wanted to live more that way than how I had intended to live before taking MDMA.

PLAYBOY: What is your drug use like now?

HARRIS: Very rare. I've taken some edibles for sleep of late, with indifferent results. But I can go for years without smoking cannabis. I drink socially.

PLAYBOY: Would you be okay if your young daughters one day experimented with any of these mind agents?

HARRIS: I wrote in my book Waking Up that if my daughters don't try at least one psychedelic at some point in their lives, I would think they will have missed a very important rite of passage. I still think that's true, though when the time comes, I'll be wanting to curate that choice a little more heavy-handedly than I let on in that paragraph. I would follow Michael Pollan's admonishment [from his book How to Change Your Mind] and take LSD under supervision. It is now becoming more professionalised, with psychotherapists actually doing this work.

PLAYBOY: Were you a nerd in high school?

HARRIS: [Laughs] No, I was successfully social in high school. I was a very good student, but I would have fun and party. I would get stoned on the weekends. In retrospect, it seems pretty balanced, though there was probably a little too much binge drinking. It wasn't like the hookup culture you have now, but I had a few serious girlfriends.

PLAYBOY: While we're on sex, what's your view of pornography?

HARRIS: I'm of two minds about it. On the

one hand, it's totally fine and benign. Obviously there should be no laws against it. That's just a straight up free speech issue. I'm sure there are people working in the industry who are not casualties of it, they're just really into sex and it's a rational way for them to make money. They're not addicted to drugs. They're not being mistreated by anybody. They have healthy relationships. They weren't raped by their stepfathers. It's all fine. It's not part of the symptomology of some immense psychological suffering. And I'm sure the worst of the worst stories we can imagine are also true, where it's about junkies getting their next fix, people being coerced into situations, sexual slavery. You pull up a video on Pornhub and you don't know what you're looking at. It could be somebody who was kidnapped. This industry makes money based on everyone's fascination with sex, and you could be supporting the worst people on earth who are victimising people. So that's the reality of the industry.

PLAYBOY: What about the user experience?

HARRIS: Well, there are people who can look at pornography and it can be part of a completely healthy sex life, where they have healthy relationships and are happy. Nobody sees it as analogous to cheating on their partner or diminishing their sexual connection. A couple can watch it together and it improves their sex life. That's the healthy version, but then there are obviously people who are addicted, who can't have healthy relationships. It's a stand-in for people who are not able to navigate social connections. And now you have 12-year-olds getting their sexual education by randomly seeing videos of grown-ups doing unthinkable acrobatic and demeaning sex acts. There's something there that's worth worrying about.

As with so much of technology, we're running a psychology experiment on ourselves and we don't know how it's going to come out. It's unnatural to have endless access to imagery of people. Pornography aside, this is something I completely missed in my dating life, but I don't know what Tinder is doing to the prospect of finding meaningful relationships. It gives the sense that there's always someone else behind the person you're considering. It's the paradox of choice, where you're never satisfied because you have endless options.

PLAYBOY: Let's change pace and do a lightning round. Am I wrong for grilling up hamburgers and hot dogs this weekend?

HARRIS: I think factory farming, as generally practiced, is indefensible. I think we should put economic pressure on the system to become as benign as possible. Ultimately that might mean everyone being vegetarian, but I don't think being vegetarian is idiot-proof in terms of human health. I try to support the grass-fed, ecologically sound, cage-free version of everything I eat. And I've actually invested in a start-up called Memphis Meats, which is cell-culturebased — a so-called clean meat company start-up, which hopefully will get to scale. That would be meat that completely takes the animal out of the equation. You take a single cell from the cow that you want to turn into a steak — it's literally a tiny muscle biopsy — and that then gets amplified and cultured. It's not quite there yet. Last I looked, they had an $18,000 meatball, but apparently it tastes good and their cost is coming down.

PLAYBOY: What are your binge-TV indulgences?

HARRIS: *Game of Thrones, Westworld, Breaking Bad, Mad Men.* I like *Ozark* a lot. Darren Aronofsky, a great filmmaker, has a new show called *One Strange Rock*, which is basically his version of *Cosmos*.

PLAYBOY: Do you have any hidden talents?

HARRIS: I have a black belt in ninjutsu. Remember the ninja? However, that was in the pre-MMA era, when almost every martial art was a pantomime of fake violence. The training was very similar to Krav Maga today — not entirely useless but not 100 percent legit either. More recently, my midlife crisis took the form of getting into Brazilian jujitsu. I'm just a blue belt, though, and I keep getting injured.

PLAYBOY: Kanye West — go!

HARRIS: I was never a Kanye fan and he's a bit chaotic as a political commentator. I do not understand a person who looks at Trump and says, "Yeah, that's exactly what I want my president to be." That's a strange mental space to live in.

PLAYBOY: Favourite Ben Affleck movie?

HARRIS: I thought Argo was good. I don't think I saw his last Batman movie. As you know, Ben and I have a checkered history, but I don't have anything bad to say about him as an actor or a director. He's just not a religious scholar.

PLAYBOY: What do you sing in the shower?

HARRIS: I don't really sing. I can chant. Mostly it's Hindu music. I can hang out with the Hare Krishnas.

PLAYBOY: Let's talk about mindfulness, since it's now a big part of your platform. What's your take on the concept?

HARRIS: Mindfulness is about freeing yourself from certain patterns of mind so that you realise you are not your thoughts. I draw this analogy between the mind and kidnappers: It's as though you've been kidnapped by the most boring person on earth and just forced to listen to this guy all day long. Literally, the conversation starts the moment you wake up and doesn't end until you fall helplessly asleep at night. Mindfulness is an alternative to that, but it takes some training to get it. If you can notice a thought as a thought, if you can step back and relinquish your identification with that process and just notice it as a process, as a kind of automaticity in your mind, then you're no longer a hostage.

PLAYBOY: How is your Waking Up meditation app different from all other meditation apps?

HARRIS: If you want to learn to meditate, there are half a dozen apps that will teach you, and they're all well made. My app is more intrusive. The real purpose of meditation is to recognise something about the nature of your mind. In the guided meditations I'm trying to get you to realise that, for instance, there's no self in the middle of consciousness. There's no thinker in addition to the thoughts that arise in your mind. Traditionally, that has been the very centre of the bull's eye in a Buddhist meditation practice and for practitioners. But it's something you can spend a lot of time meditating on and not notice.

PLAYBOY: Who is on your dream list of podcast guests?

HARRIS: I'd like to talk to Ed Witten, the physicist other physicists will tell you is the smartest physicist they've ever met. Filmmaker Deeyah Khan is a Muslim woman who made a documentary on white supremacy in the U.S. She's like Kryptonite for neo-Nazis because she's a gorgeous woman of colour those guys want to bond with, but then she says, "Wait a minute. You want to throw me out?"

I would also consider talking to some quintessentially bad people just to see if there's an interesting ethical conversation to be had. The Unabomber might be too far gone, but it would be fascinating to actually get into the head of someone like Bernie Madoff and try to figure out why he did what he did and what he thinks about it now. There's a kind of uncanny valley phenomenon that happens ethically, where if you make someone bad enough, it's fine to talk to them. Like you can interview Osama bin Laden or Hitler — great, no problem. You don't have to waste time signalling to your audience, "Well, listen, I didn't support Auschwitz." But if you were to have Richard Spencer on your podcast, then you've given a platform to a dangerous asshole. That's an interesting problem for me to navigate.

PLAYBOY: What do you most want to know about the future?

HARRIS: I'm very interested in the revolution we're on the cusp of right now with intelligent machines and the way they're going to transform our life. I can't wait to see the implications of the outsourcing and improvement of our understanding of ourselves as we become more cyborg than we already are. When I look at how dependent I am on my phone, I can't even remember what it was like to arrange to meet someone in public. "I'll meet you at three." And if that person didn't show up? You would call their answering machine and hope they'd call in to check their messages. Now we just expect to connect with everyone instantaneously.

There are going to be so many binary changes like that, and I think they're going to get weirder and weirder. The current picture of immunology, for example, is that we're basically always getting cancer and we're always fighting cancer. Cancer is just a sort of background noise problem we're always dealing with. But at a certain point you might have nanobots detecting cancer. You'll be able to look at your phone and see what your cancer levels are. We'll look back on cancer the way we now look back on polio, as something that was absolutely terrifying.

The fact is, with so many things we don't even know to ask the question because we can't imagine what the shape of the answer would be. It's not crazy to think that we could be among the last generations for whom ageing is the default reality. I'm reasonably persuaded that you can view ageing as a kind of engineering problem that can be solved. This is gerontologist Aubrey de Grey's argument. We may not get there in our lifetimes or our kids' lifetimes, but at a certain point you solve the problem. The universe may not care about us, but it's not out to get us. And so there are problems we can solve that will stay solved. The sky really is the limit, which in that context will make getting hit by a bus or a flying car that much more anomalous and horrible. It's one of the reasons I think the left is so poised for embarrassment — because political correctness and identity politics and victimology can't survive contact with all the information that's coming from big data and genetics. We're going to be inundated with information about human difference, but politically we know what the right answer is.

The truth is I'm agnostic about the afterlife part. Certain very strange things are possible.

Separating ourselves by identity can't matter. We know we want political equality, we're anchored there. So when we look for mean differences in populations, we're guaranteed to stumble upon facts that are politically inconvenient.

PLAYBOY: Like the fact that we're all basically the same.

HARRIS: That's right. There are just lucky people and there are unlucky people, and we should be compassionately concerned about disparities in luck and trying to create systems that make it effortless for us to collaborate in ways that make the world better for everyone. We can't rely on people to be saints or even want to become saints. We have to enshrine what people will agree to in the wisest moments at the level of our institutions and our laws and our systems so that in our weaker moments, when we're selfish or bored or filled with anger or anxiety, we're still running on rails and going in the right direction.

PLAYBOY: Incidentally, what if you're wrong about God and the afterlife?

HARRIS: The truth is I'm agnostic about the afterlife part. I don't know how consciousness arises, and therefore I don't know if by definition it ceases when we die. I mean, we just don't know. Certain very strange things are possible. It's possible that we are in some kind of computer simulation right now. There are not-crazy arguments that could lead you to be open about that. Philosopher Nick Bostrom's simulation argument is that we're intelligent enough creatures to produce intelligent machines, and eventually, if we don't kill ourselves first, we will produce simulated worlds in these simulated machines filled with creatures with a level of consciousness as it is in our human brains. And we'll get better and better at this, and at a certain point simulated worlds by definition will outnumber real worlds — and not just by a small number, because there's only one real world out there. They'll outnumber the real world by trillions and trillions of times. So then you have to ask yourself if it is more likely that you're in a real world or a simulated world.

Then you can add alien civilisations, and we're in a kind of computational space. Once the simulations get good enough, we can't expect to know the difference between simulation and reality. That's a way of talking yourself into assuming that it's quite possible you're in something like the Matrix already. If that's true, well, then what would it mean to believe in God, and are we on the hard drive of some alien supercomputer?

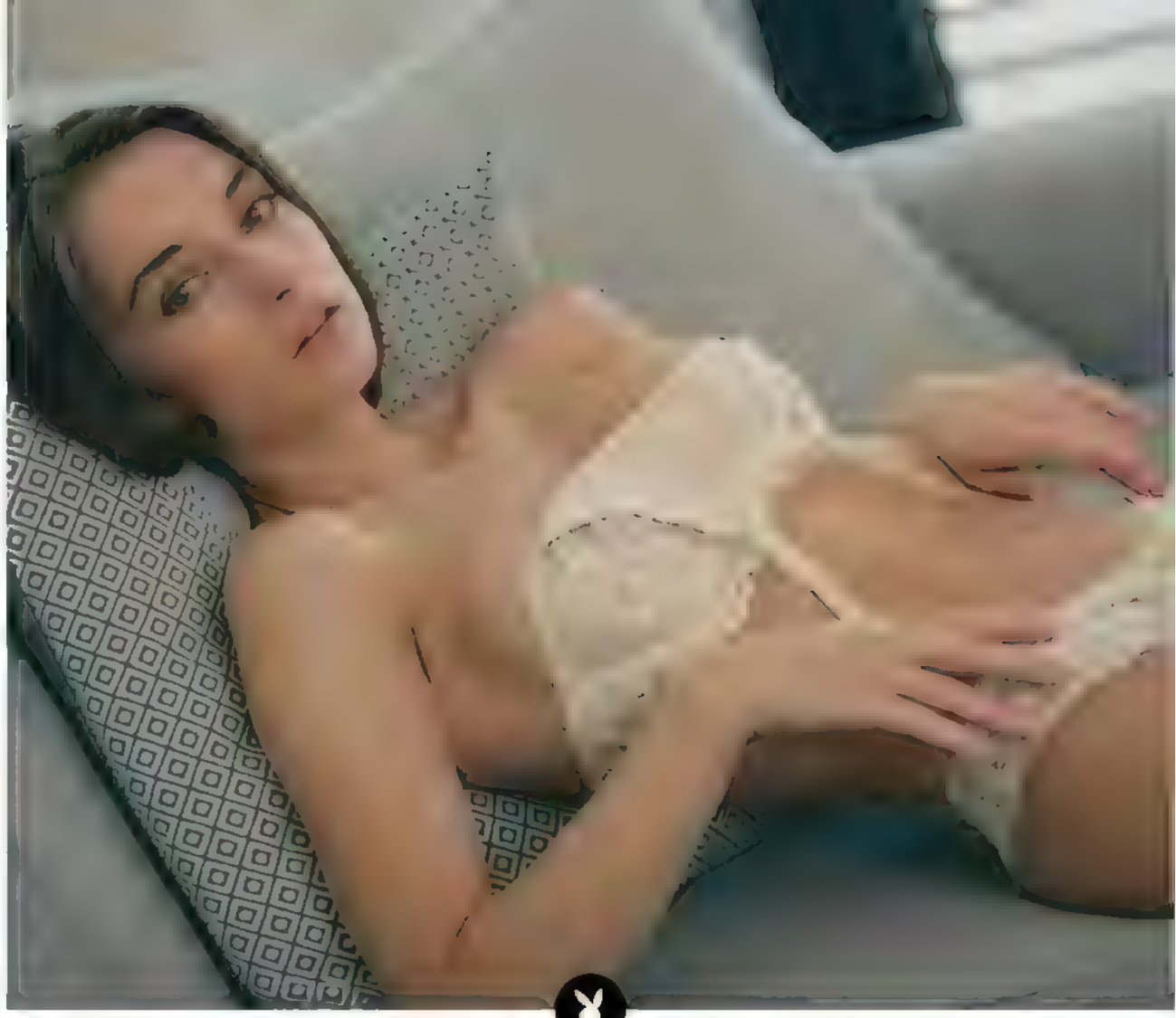
PLAYBOY: Either way, do you plan on being cremated?

HARRIS: I don't know. I don't think it's in my will. For some reason, I have a bias for burial just because I like the idea. I like cemeteries. I guess you could spread someone's ashes, but it's nice having a place where people can go to think about the person.

PLAYBOY: What would you like it to say on your tombstone?

HARRIS: A big number. 1967 to 2267. ■

"I'd feel more comfortable if my safe word was at least eight characters long with one number and an uppercase letter."



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Tanya Renee

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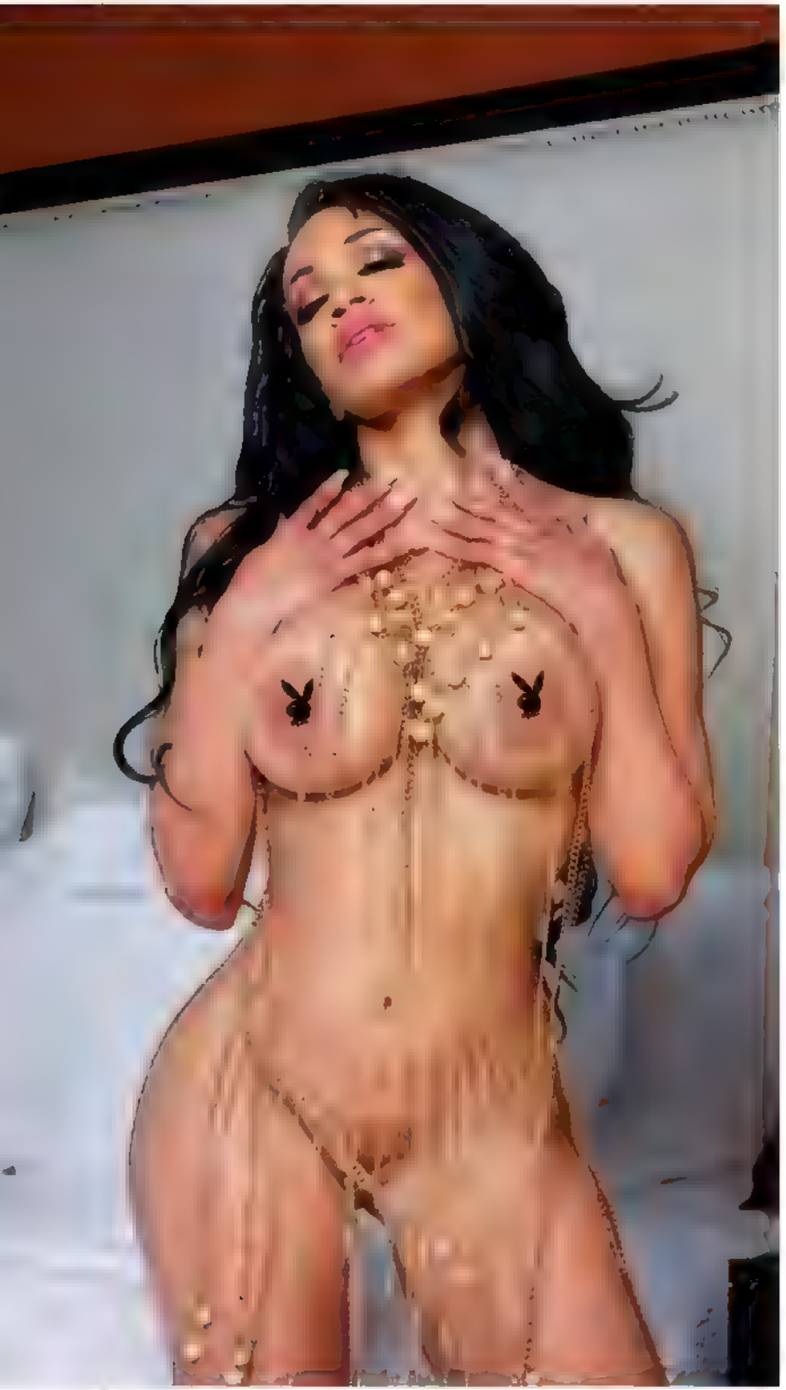


Tell us a little about yourself.
Spontaneous, witty female with an old sou and huge boobs Lol!!

What do you enjoy most about what you do?
I love travel ng and challeng ng myse f to go as many new destinations as possib e in a year

What is your greatest life achievement thus far?
Surviv.ng fibroids

What would you say is your best feature?
My eyes & my bosoms

What makes you feel sexy?
Lingerie and freshly filled nails

What advice would you give to women aspiring to get into modeling?
Only shoot with estab shed photographers ask questions, maintain control of the shoot, and don t be cheap

Favourite Shoot Location?
The beach or a penthouse suite with ots of natural light

Do you prefer kissing or cuddling?
Cuddling

What are you really good at?
Networking and helping peop e

What is one thing people may be surprised to find out about you?
That I am add cted to YouTube. I can watch t for HOOOOURS

Do you have a catchphrase?
' Always overdressed w.th never enough on

MURDER They Rapped

From platinum stars to local heroes, hip-hop artists are seeing their lyrics used against them in criminal trials; here's a look at a problematic and growing trend through the eyes of the accused

BY **JEFF WEISS**

There was no discernible reason for the police to follow Drakeo the Ruler that afternoon. As he later told me, no traffic violations were committed, no weed was smoked. But constitutional questions of rightful search and seizure don't seem to trouble the cops patrolling South Central Los Angeles, and so a brief drive to the liquor store last winter ended with L.A.'s most original rap stylist since Snoop Dogg handcuffed, accused of illegal possession of a firearm and looking on as law enforcement showed him his own videos and rapped his own lyrics at him. Things only got weirder from there.

Over the next several weeks, other members of Drakeo's crew, the Stinc Team, were also arrested. The charges ranged from first-degree murder to commercial burglary, enhanced by the threat of lengthy mandatory sentences due, according to Drakeo, to the district attorney's accusation that the Stinc Team is a gang rather than one of the West Coast's most

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MAURIZIO DI IORIO**

popular young hip-hop collectives. As far as evidence goes, his attorney has claimed that the case largely hinges on a jailhouse confession allegedly obtained by an informant. So in an effort to demonise the 25-year-old artist, prosecutors are using Drakeo's music and flashy, carefully cultivated image against him.

"That's bullshit. I can say whatever I want," the rapper born Darrell Caldwell says from inside the Men's Central Jail in downtown Los Angeles. During Drakeo's months of incarceration, the judge has refused to grant him bail. "They're only doing this because I'm a rapper—and a black rapper at that," he says. "I go hard to make sure that you can interpret my music in 20 different ways, but they're still trying to use it to paint a false picture of me."

Since emerging in 2015, Drakeo has developed a diamond-encrusted and cryptic universe with an anxiety riddled mutation of gangsta rap called "nervous music." His lyrics are full of comic exaggeration and coded lingo in which a single phrase can yield multiple meanings depending on context. In his case, prosecutors have cherrypicked several verses in an attempt to depict him as a menace to society. Before a grand jury indicted him, they listened to 2016's "Bully Breaker," a song full of semiautomatic braggadocio.

You know we keep the bully breaker
Fuck you talking about
Choppa on my waist
Lil nigga ain't finna talk it out
Bully who?
Nah my niggas we finna chalk him out
Disrespect the gang any way
We finna spazz out

For all the lyrical complexity of Drakeo's catalogue, authorities have singled out some of his more boilerplate verses, ones that fit squarely within the 30-year legacy of Los Angeles gangsta rap — which began with Toddy Tee's "Batterram" and Ice T's "6 'N' the Mornin'," both dueling narratives of the Daryl Gates–era police force breaking down their doors. Nor is Drakeo's lyrical content dissimilar from N.W.A's "Gangsta Gangsta," in which Ice Cube raps, "I got a shotgun / And here's the plot / Takin' niggas out with a flurry of buck shots." But that was in 1988. The ensuing three decades of new anti-gang laws in California have strengthened prosecutors' ability to brand almost any gathering as a gang. As defined in the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act, a "criminal street gang" is "a group of three or more people which has a common name or identifying sign or symbol." In the hands of prosecutors seeking big-name convictions, this can be used to define just about any street rap crew.

Drakeo's defence attorney, Frank Duncan, considers the case against his client to be flimsy — the result, in part, of earlier burglary charges for which he was never convicted. Drakeo's lyrics focus far more on small-time burglaries than on murder, but prosecutors tend to leap at the opportunity to scare juries with stereotypes of sociopathic gang members.

"It allows them to poison the jury pool and makes it a lot easier to prosecute, everyone immediately dislikes you if they think you're a gang member," Duncan says. "Removed from context, these songs can sound very incriminating. But the reality is that this is L.A. gangsta rap. It has always been about violence and crime."

• • •

The First Amendment's safeguards have historically done little to shield rappers from obscenity charges or character assassination. In 1989, the Detroit police arrested the members of N.W.A after the group played "Fuck Tha Police" in concert despite a warning from law enforcement. The next year, members of 2 Live Crew were arrested at a Broward County nightclub for performing raunchy songs from their album As Nasty As They Wanna Be. (A jury later acquitted them of obscenity charges.) In 1992, 2Pac was forced to defend himself in a civil suit filed by the family of a murdered Texas state trooper whose killer claimed that the rapper's 2Pacalypse Now spurred him to commit the crime. No less than Vice President Dan Quayle demanded that Time Warner Inc. yank the album from stores — mirroring what was done earlier that summer to Ice-T, whose song "Cop Killer" had incited a national furore.

During the past decade, this constitutional right to free expression has been called into question for both platinum artists — including Young Thug, accused of playing a role in a 2015 shooting of Lil Wayne's tour bus — and obscure aspirants. And as the 24/7 nature of social media and Instagram Live erases the already blurry line between real life and public persona, police surveillance has only increased, imperilling rappers' ability to satisfy the oftvoyeuristic interest of their fans.

The intractable need for authenticity, the visceral qualities of the art form itself and outright racism have led to rappers' own words being used against them in courts of law. The injustice is specific to the form, even though, in a culture riven by gun violence and blood-soaked mythologies, rappers are merely the latest in a lineage that stretches back to well before Billy the Kid. In some instances, attorneys have argued that the creative fictions of rappers are little different from Johnny Cash's musical boast of shooting a man in Reno just to watch him die. No one arrested Bob Marley for shooting the sheriff. Handcuffs were not slapped on Jim Morrison for the patricide depicted in "The End" (instead, Miami police waited to get him on an obscenity charge).

"The desire of the police to conflate rap groups and gangs is partly ignorance, but there's also something more nefarious at hand," says Andrea Dennis, a professor at the University of Georgia Law School and co-author of the forthcoming book Rap on Trial. "California law makes it easy to fit rap groups into the definition of a gang, but calling yourself a gang dates back to the early gang roots of hip-hop, where groups would often call themselves posses, crews or gangs." Dennis continues, "People have gotten familiar with rap, their kids listen to it and it has become more artistic and creative. You might think that would lead to anti-rap sentiment dying down, but it has only intensified. People think they're surrounded by it."

• • •

A similar argument was made by Boosie Badazz (born Torrence Hatch) and his attorneys during his 2012 murder trial. Over the previous decade, the Baton Rouge rapper had burnished his legend as the 2Pac of the 21st century South. A brazen and raw artist raised on the impoverished South Side, Boosie released his rap titled "Fuck the Police" in 2007, and that version became part of the protests that sprang up along with the Black Lives Matter movement. Unsurprisingly, it did little to endear him to law enforcement.

According to the Baton Rouge district attorney's office, Boosie paid a teenage hitman, Michael "Marlo Mike" Louding, to murder the brother of his baby's mother. The authorities successfully petitioned the judge to admit as evidence several songs they claimed had been recorded the night of the killing.

In front of the jury, lead prosecutor Dana Cummings played a cappella versions of two compositions. She cited this passage from "187" as one of the most damning:

Yo Marlo, he got a Monte Carlo
That bitch grey
I want that bitch dead today

Defence attorneys successfully argued that none of the lyrics conclusively tied Boosie to the slaying. Although Boosie used the name of the alleged murderer, his lawyers said the dead man didn't drive a Monte Carlo — a reminder that art often borrows from real life and even autobiographies may create composite characters, compress time sequences and generally exercise creative license for the sake of the story. Prosecutors often counter that presenting lyrics can be essential to proving motive, intent, identity and absence of mistake. Yet in Boosie's case, the jury — intimating they agreed with the defence's position that his songs were merely reflections of the hyper-violence of Baton Rouge, a city with a murder rate that eclipsed Chicago's in 2017 — unanimously voted for acquittal.

• • •

The problem is more pressing than just celebrity cases. According to Dennis, several hundred similar cases exist outside the limelight. Arguably the most extreme example of prosecutorial overreach is that of San Diego rapper Tiny Doo (a.k.a. Brandon Duncan), who served seven months in prison for a crime that, in a sense, no one even accused him of committing. It concerned his 2014 mixtape No Safety, which a district attorney's office seized upon to test a rarely used California law that says anyone who actively participates in a criminal street gang and "who wilfully promotes, furthers, assists or benefits from any felonious criminal conduct by members of that gang" can be found guilty of conspiracy to commit that felony.

The case involved a string of shootings that prosecutors claimed were the work of San Diego's Lincoln Park Bloods. Brandon Duncan had once been affiliated with the gang, but at the time of the crimes he was working a full-time job laying tile. By citing a relatively little-heard album with a cover photo of a pistol with the safety off, prosecutors claimed he was promoting the gang and therefore culpable of any act of wrongdoing any other member of the gang may have committed. It was only after seven months in prison and significant media scrutiny that a Superior Court judge ruled that Duncan was being wrongly prosecuted.

"There are black kids serving 25 years to life for lyrics that they've written," says Duncan, who is currently suing the San Diego Police Department and two of its detectives for violating his First Amendment rights and for unlawful search and seizure. "People think that everything we're speaking about is real, and they're completely taking the entertainment value out of it. Sometimes it's based off real situations, but sometimes it might be about something that happened to someone I know. We're just trying to paint an accurate picture of the urban landscape."

Nonetheless, the war between rap and the fundamental right to free speech figures to intensify in the coming years. Prosecutors and lawmakers are considering something called "true threat," a type of communication for which artists can be incarcerated simply for lyrically threatening a rival. And the explosion of social media has only made it easier for law enforcement to track every move of the rap community.

According to Erik Nielson, a professor at the University of Richmond and co-author of Rap on Trial, the head of the police gang unit in Newport News, Virginia told him that his officers spend half their time monitoring gangs (and presumably local rappers) online.

"It feels Orwellian, but just as scary as that is the sheer incompetence of people performing these Orwellian functions," Nielson says. "These people have no idea what they're talking about. And it's only going to get worse. Social media offers both a low barrier to entry and the opportunity to get famous without a record label. These artists might write sophisticated raps, but their business acumen and awareness about these issues might not be on par. And the police are watching their every step." ■

Drakeo the Ruler, shown here on the outside, was still in custody at press time.

"THEY'RE ONLY DOING THIS BECAUSE I'M A RAPPER—AND A BLACK RAPPER AT THAT."

Celebrating 65 Years of

PLAYBOY'S PARTY JOKES

Along with compelling fiction and provocative pictorials, cocktail-hour chuckles stretch all the way back to the magazine's inaugural issue. Here, a six-decade sampling of some of our favourite laughs from the past

JANUARY 1956

The dean of women at an exclusive girls' school was lecturing her students on sexual morality.

"We live today in very difficult times for young people. In moments of temptation," she said, "ask yourself just one question. Is an hour of pleasure worth a lifetime of shame?"

A young woman rose in the back of the room and said, "Excuse me, but how do you make it last an hour?"

MARCH 1957

You've undoubtedly heard about the number of magazines required to fill a baby carriage: a PLAYBOY, a *Mademoiselle*, a few *Libertes* and *Time*.

MARCH 1968

"Hey, man," one hippie said to another, "turn on the radio."

"Okay," the second hippie answered, and then leaning over very close to the radio, he whispered, "I love you."

DECEMBER 1968

A Chicago salesman on a business trip to Boston had a few hours to kill before catching a plane home. Remembering an old friend's advice to try some broiled scrod, a favourite fish in Boston, he hopped into a cab and asked the driver, "Say, do you know where I could get scrod around here?"

"Pal," replied the cabbie, "I've heard that question a thousand times, but this is the first time in the pluperfect subjunctive."

JULY 1979

A story is circulating about the flaky botanical geneticist in southern California who is trying to cross a Mexican jumping bean with a cucumber in order to produce the world's first organic vibrator.

OCTOBER 1989

What does Dan Quayle think *Roe v. Wade* is? Two ways to cross the Potomac.

JUNE 1992

We understand there's a dyslexic rabbi who, when consternated, exclaims, "Yo!"

DECEMBER 1999

Scuttlebutt in D.C. is that Bill Clinton has already written his presidential memoirs. He's calling it *The Johnson Years*.

FEBRUARY 2006

How is poker like sex?

Everyone thinks they are the best, but most people don't know what they are doing.

NOVEMBER 2006

A man walked into a bookstore and asked a saleswoman, "Can you direct me to the selfhelp section?"

"Sure," she replied, "but wouldn't that defeat the purpose?"

JUNE 2008

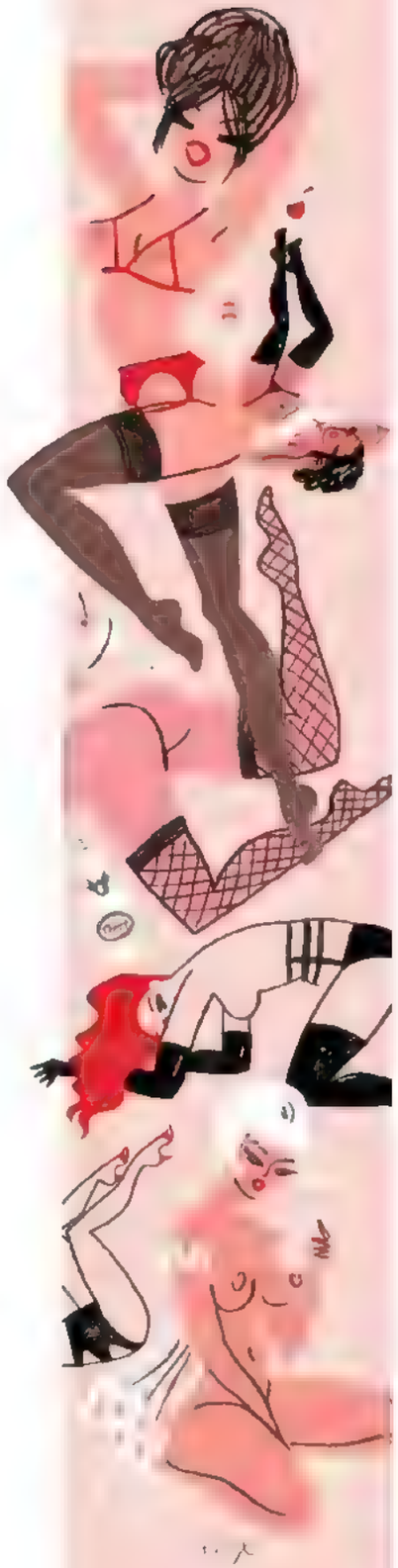
"I have to be very careful not to get pregnant," a woman told her friend.

"I don't understand," said the friend. "I thought your husband had a vasectomy."

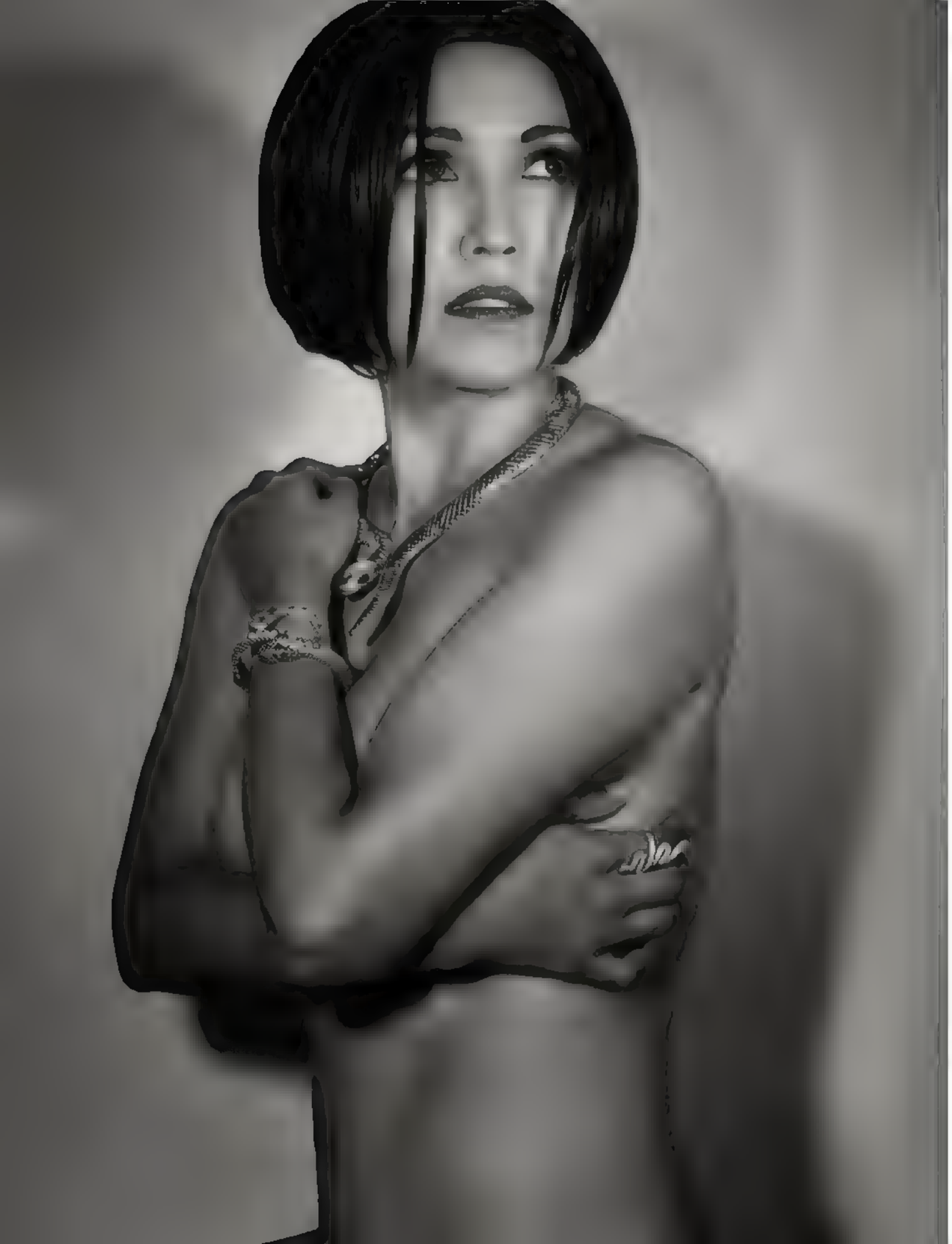
The woman answered, "Precisely."

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2018

The trouble with political jokes is that they sometimes get elected.



"Was it good for you?"



Jenny
GARZA

Photography by **ANTHONY NESTE**
Model **@MERMAID_KINI**

Describe yourself in three words.
Loya , Funny Determined

Were you excited to shoot for Playboy?
Absolute y I ove th s magazine have a ways admired mode s ke, Jenny McCarthy, Pame a Anderson, Car men Electra who got their start with Playboy

What was it like starting out as a model?
It's not easy never know what the photographer or pub ication s ooking for It was constantly a tering my ook or sty e to fit what they want. t takes building the re ationsh ps and net working to fina y get to a stage where you can ,ust be yourse f and they are com'ng to YOU for your ook and sty e.

What would you consider to be your biggest challenge as a model so far?
Staying in shape LOVE food!! Haha

Describe your perfect day off when you are not modelling?
Hanging out at a theme park w th friends or fam y

Do you feel more like a city person or a country person?
I've ived n both. I wou d rather ive in the country with easy access to the city

If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?
Eng and.

Do you have a secret talent?
Not rea ly haha

A guilty pleasure?
I ove binge watch ng shows on Netflix or Amazon

Which song is absolutely certain to make you cry whenever you hear it?
Hurt by Christ na Agui era

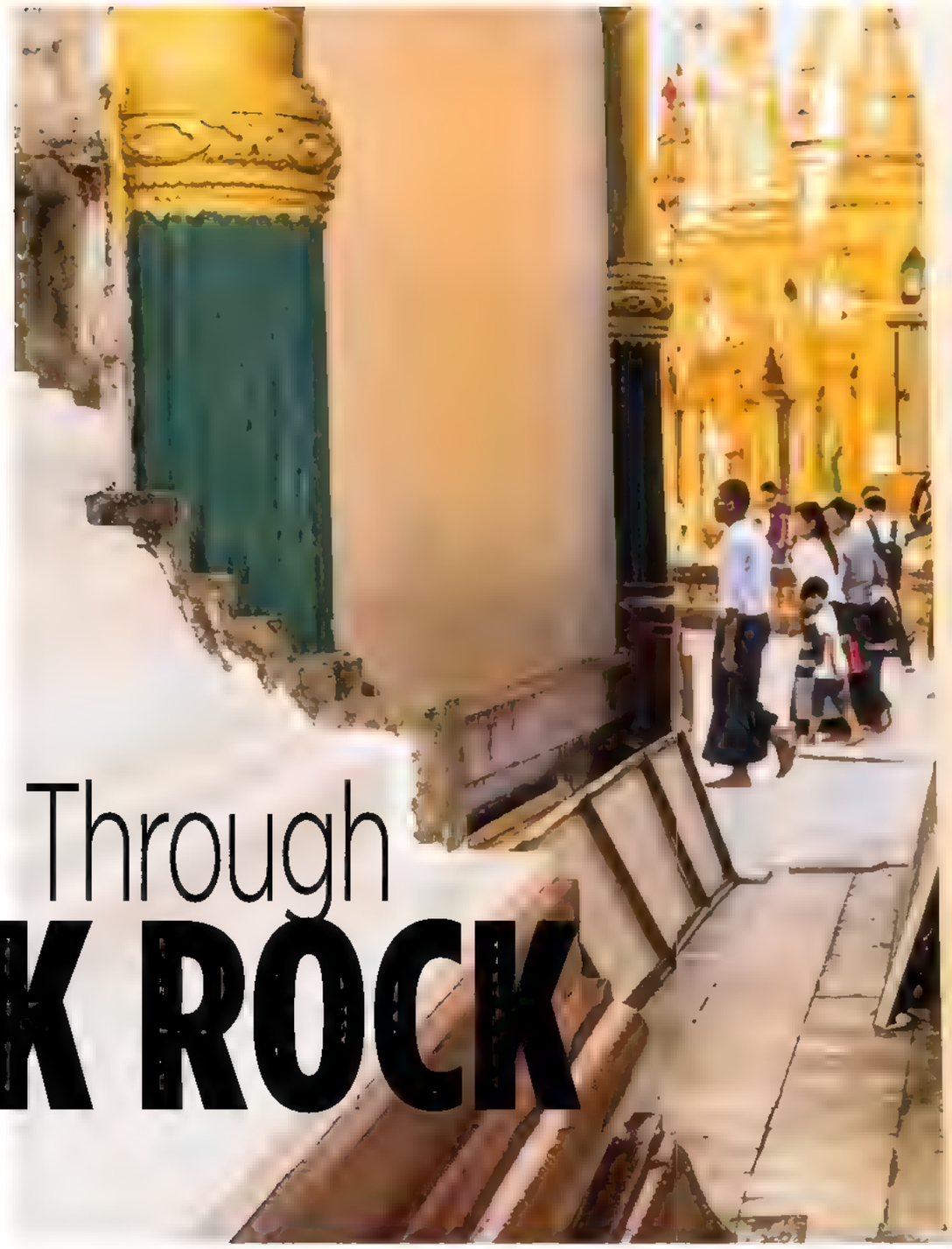
What is your favourite word in any language and what does it mean?
Sassafras t's ,ust a p ant that is used to f avour th ngs ke root beer When was a kid, d.dn t know what it meant but t had the word "sass" in it, so f gured t meant "to be sassy" So, I used to ca a my sassy fr ends a "sassafras"

Any last words you would like to share with the readers?
Thanks for the support If you're not fo owing me a ready, p ease fo ow me on Instagram to keep fo owing my work.

In most places, punk has become a safe and predictable rite of passage; in Yangon, Myanmar's largest city, it's a matter of life and death

STORY AND PHOTOS BY
DANIEL C. BRITT

Peace Through PUNK ROCK



Min Sid, singer of Yangon punk band Outcast, has a smoke at Shwedagon Pagoda

Min Sid's upper lip curls and his tattooed hands twitch at the wrist. Slight spasms grab at the 22-year-old punk rocker's cheek as he examines the sharp silhouettes in front of him. Onstage at the Caribbean-themed Pirate Bar in downtown Yangon, he's a living metaphor for his country, Myanmar — its modern skin and its bone-deep agony.

He wrote songs in 2017 while weaning himself off heroin with street methadone and amphetamines. Tremors still run like falling dominoes up his arms and into his face, a steady hum below Min Sid's smile as he watches 50 punks, all dyed Mohawks and fishnet T-shirts, fall over one another. Everyone is sloppy-friendly drunk, and everyone in the room loves Min Sid, the Yangon punk scene's rising star. Everyone is his brother — his "bruzaaah!" Still, he can't help but wonder if the police will cut the power to the show, as they have in the past, or how many of the taxi drivers hopping out of their cabs to eyeball the crowd are paid police informants.

For these 20-somethings dousing one another in beer, this is a gathering of chosen family. The Yangon punk scene breaks down into three waves stretching back to the mid-1990s, and luminaries from all three are in attendance. Shway (not his real name), the reclusive founding father of Yangon punk, with hair too thin to be teased into a Mohawk, perches on a bar stool with his video camera. He brought the first punk CDs — bootlegged compilations of songs by New York band the Casualties — into the Yangon open-air markets in 1996. Kyaw Thu Win, a.k.a. Kyaw Kyaw, is credited with founding the scene's more worldly and web-savvy second wave. His band, Rebel Riot, has been covered extensively by European journalists and young documentary filmmakers ever since. Tonight he's master of ceremonies, popping in and out of the spotlight, hyping the younger musicians and rallying the crowd with chants: "Fuck discrimination! Fuck the war!"

At punk shows from Oakland, California to Ridgewood, New York, cries like these are obligatory, implied or mocked, and the studded jackets are Halloween costumes — relics of a scene supplanted by myriad subgenres. In Myanmar, where decades of discrimination have tumbled into genocide and the civil war has been nursed by successive junta leaders to span the past seven decades, "fuck the war" means fuck the norm. It means fuck the one thing all 135 ethnicities in Myanmar have in common — life dangerously close to blood-speckled grass and villages set ablaze by government soldiers.

Opposite: *A Yangon punker mounts a charm offensive.* ***Above, clockwise from top left:*** *Min Sid strikes a biblical pose outside Shwedagon Pagoda; punks take a break from Pirate Bar's beer-soaked mayhem; Kyaw Kyaw displays a print from the photo shoot that resulted in personal threats and his written promise that he'd leave the Buddha out of future Rebel Riot endeavours.*

Ten or 20 foreign aid workers pepper the floor, swaying above the native crowd like pale palms in thick tennis shoes. (Most nights, Pirate Bar is where this group seeks new faces in the humanitarian dating pool.) Like every other damp, green-lit gin mill and beer station in Yangon, Pirate Bar tends to observe an unspoken ban on political discussions, with a special sensitivity to opinions about the Rohingya exodus from Myanmar's Rakhine state. So it's an unlikely place for an ideological cri de coeur, but on this April night, the world churning around the pencil-thin punk musicians of Myanmar's largest city has made it one. Since Shway's first efforts, a line has been drawn between Yangon punks and the rest of their conservative homeland. When Min Sid and his band, Outcast, take the stage, they're entering their country's culture war, a shouting match between the Buddhist majority, more than 35 million strong, and a small community of derelict punk rockers, starving artists and university students.

Both sides have their heels dug in, jockeying for the philosophical heart of a military state only recently reopened to the West with the free election of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2015. The three-front civil war the government has waged against minority populations for the past 70 years has been decried in only a few places in Myanmar; Pirate Bar is one of them. Cops generally tolerate the punks, but the bar is only a mile from the notoriously corrupt Kyauktada police station, so all bets are off. In January 2018, Kyauktada station cops forced poet and Muslim civil rights activist Than Toe Aung into the back of a van. They beat him there and at the station before his family paid a bribe for his release.

Suddenly power chords pummel the thick air, ascending in pitch and volume; in his mind, Min Sid begins to levitate. Music is like heroin in that way, he says later: It makes him feel like he's floating. He turns his back to the crowd and focuses on the scrawny musicians onstage with him.

He screams into the mike, "Break *boundaraaaay!*"

He's floating above the boundaries he grew up with — a nationalist education, a traditional Burmese society based on conformity and a marathon of military assaults that formed a circle of death around Yangon.

He aims his addled truth at the ceiling: "*Cunt authoritaaaay!*"

A few blocks beyond Min Sid's voice, in the Yaw Min Gyi neighbourhood, Buddhist devotees young and old lay down long red carpets on closed-off streets. It's only a few weeks before the April New Year's celebration, and plush outdoor meditation rugs line large portions of the city. Rocking back and forth

with their eyes closed, somewhere between wakefulness and sleep, monks lead the crowd droning mantras for hours into the hot night.

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Burma, the former British colony and Japanese puppet state, rejected its colonial name in 1989 in exchange for Myanmar, a move meant to acknowledge not just the ethnic Burmese majority but all the ethnicities within its borders. That may have been the government's last move toward inclusivity. Its attacks on the Rohingya, Kachin, Shan and Karen people in 2017 and 2018 make Myanmar's overarching domestic policy look like a race to violently displace minorities — for mineral resources in the case of the Kachin, for poppy farmland in the case of the Shan and Karen, and for fear of a religious and cultural takeover in the case of the Rohingya Muslims.

The Myanmar government of the 1990s was as opaque and as opposed to freedom of expression as it is today. Large expanses of the countryside were closed to journalists and the public, as they are now. Locals say much of that land was grabbed by the military and privately mined for jade or divided into government contract farms. Those who got too close to exposing the illegal economies in those regions were jailed or disappeared altogether, according to Kyaw Kyaw. "There is danger for people who make noise — still today," he says.

The journalist Soe Moe Tun, reporting on illegal logging in the Sagaing region, was beaten to death in late 2016. The same year, two reporters' homes were threatened with bombs in the Rakhine and Kachin states. In another case, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, two Reuters reporters who uncovered a mass grave and verified the summary execution of 10 Rohingya men by government soldiers and Buddhist villagers in Rakhine state in the fall of 2017, have been sentenced to seven-year prison sentences for violating the Official Secrets Act. A vague and antiquated piece of colonial legislation, the OSA was enacted by the British Governorate in 1923 to classify evidence of corruption as an official state secret, allowing colonials to jail Burmese insurgents.

Myanmar's openness to Western business can be seen in the expat boat parties in the port of Yangon and the slick bars and English-language classrooms popping up all over the city. Distrust of the Western media and international standards of free speech, which flowed in with the American and European money, is just as plain.

"Fake news from America!" is a frequent café reaction to *New York Times* stories that treat Myanmar government militarism as acts of war instead of self-defence or antiterrorism measures. Inquisitive foreigners are likely to be told they have no right to speak about Myanmar, but the reality of this young democracy is that natives are also limited in their right to talk about their country. Laws governing protest, telecommunications and defamation, many left over from British colonial rule, are still used by the government to jail critics. Human Rights Watch reports that by the beginning of 2016, 166 people were awaiting trial for breaking the Peaceful Assembly Law, including students who'd protested against the role of the military in government, farmers who'd protested the confiscation of their land for government gem mines and journalists who'd protested the arrest of other journalists. The legislation's vague language penalises "statements likely to cause fear and alarm" and those who "disturb the public tranquillity."

To make matters worse, political activism in Myanmar fell into complacency after once lauded humanitarian Aung San Suu Kyi took office as state councillor in 2016.

"Their reasoning was that Aung San Suu Kyi was elected democratically. It's what the people wanted, so what is there left to protest?" says Zin Linn, a Yangon-based musician and activist on the fringes of the punk scene.

Since Aung San Suu Kyi's election, the Tatmadaw, the military arm of the Myanmar government, has maintained considerable operations countrywide. In August, the United Nations called for Myanmar's military leaders to be tried in the International Criminal Court in The Hague for war crimes committed during the 2017 crackdown on the Rohingya. By September China had announced its opposition to "internationalising" issues surrounding the Rohingya crisis, effectively saying it would vote against extraditing Myanmar's military leaders for a trial.

Aung San Suu Kyi has proven reluctant to denounce the government's scorched-earth campaign in the Rakhine state; as a result, she's been stripped of human rights prizes including the Elie Wiesel Award from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Freedom of Oxford award and the Freedom of the City of Dublin award.

"She's the same as all the others," Zin Linn says. "It doesn't matter how they get power."

The Pirate Bar stage feels like the only place in Yangon where popular opinion doesn't fall blindly in step with the government's propaganda newspapers. Endless Western media reports that Rohingya Muslims continue to flee government- sanctioned violence in Rakhine, along with news of a spike in military assaults in Kachin, have created a sense that Yangon is an alternate universe. Silent while war is all around. Silent except for this beer-soaked bastion of free expression.

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Kyaw Kyaw says that Shway passed down his primary tenet of punk in 2004: "Solidarity," he said, "is number one."

Those words have echoed between Kyaw Kyaw's shaved temples for the past 14 years. In that time he has become the charismatic, English-speaking face of the Yangon punk scene. He and Rebel Riot are the focus of the documentary My Buddha Is Punk, released last January on Vimeo on Demand. Another rumoured project, a crowd-funded narrative film about a female filmmaker from Europe marginalised because of her fetish for Asian males, began production in the summer of 2017; Kyaw Kyaw plays the pierced love interest.

But visibility alone doesn't pay the bills, so Kyaw Kyaw converted his apartment, perched in a walk-up in the Hledan district, into a screen-printing shop. (The Rebel Riot shop sign being difficult to see from the street, it's much easier to follow the sound of Bob Marley, Cannibal Corpse and Pantera upward to the third-floor balcony.) The sale of Rebel Riot shirts pays for rent and food for the transient musicians between gigs. More important, the shop is where everyone meets. When I walk in, a metal guitarist and a Vice journalist visiting from Hamburg are smoking and talking about politics and the punk scene in Germany. Punks from the countryside wander into the shop for drunken

"BUDDHA DIDN'T NEED ANYBODY ELSE. HE WENT HIS OWN WAY, LIKE JOHNNY CASH."

The pit at Pirate Bar last April, on the night of the Outcast show.

jam sessions and family-style meals. Outcast drummer Japan Gyi celebrated his 22nd birthday there over a meal of Myanmar Beer, dried crickets and sautéed chicken heads.

Kyaw Kyaw appears to have taken Shway's philosophy of solidarity to heart while dodging corrupt police and protesting the conflicts that encircle Yangon. Focusing on the idea that political change in Myanmar must be generational, for the past three years he has been on a mission to expose schoolchildren in rural villages to punk (not to mention pop) music, the arts and the international media before they get hooked on government controlled television news. Through crowdfunding, Rebel Riot has toured Thailand, Indonesia and much of Eastern Europe, building a roster of promoters and paving the way for Outcast and other third-wave bands.

Solidarity was number one with Shway because he knew the punk community would suffocate without it. They are a generation on the margins of a traditional Buddhist society that often sees artists as people too stupid or weak to pursue careers in business. Their country is by turns maniacally pacifist and militaristic, a new democracy and an old colony. Individual rights are determined by the ethnicity listed on a person's national identification card. A tightly knit punk community — and vocal opposition to the government war machine — could grow if musicians and fans had one another's tattooed backs, if they lived as though punk were their listed ethnicity.

Meanwhile, Kyaw Kyaw and his band are at constant risk. Threats rolled in over Facebook after Kyaw Kyaw posed as a punk rock version of Buddha while other members of Rebel Riot dressed as Jesus and the Hindu goddess Shiva for a photo shoot in Thailand. When the threats intensified and found their way to Kyaw Kyaw's cell phone, he signed an agreement with a Yangon governing body stating that he would never again punkify the Buddha. But that didn't stop him from writing a song called "Fuck Religious Rules":

Fuck religious rules
There are no human rights by religious rules
There is genocide by religious wars
Religious rules fuck off!

• • •

Religious conservatism isn't the only thing threatening to snuff out the Yangon punk scene. Min Sid began his path to punk rock enlightenment — and his descent into addiction — in the blackest, mouldiest concrete tenement on Lan Thit Yeit Thar, a street on the west side of the city. Here, scraps of thick, construction-grade bamboo, browned palm fronds and the silhouettes of passed out drunks decorate the sidewalk. When it rains, cigarette butts roll into the awnings and tumble down, floor by floor, into black puddles on the sidewalk. The older buildings, with their porous concrete under- muscle exposed, grow another layer of mould, wide black patches that fade out like reverb.

In the stairwell leading up to his home, in the shadows cast by the rebar security door, Min Sid shot heroin into his arm for the first time. As a teen, he was getting paid to turn his sketches of animals into tattoos. Sometimes kids in the neighbourhood paid in cash; sometimes they paid in drugs. Min Sid quickly learned his place in the world's second-largest opioid-producing drug economy (Afghanistan being number one). Opioids and amphetamines produced in Kachin state and in the Wa region of the Shan state make their way to Yangon, according to Min Sid, and beyond the borders to Bangladesh via a network of corrupt statesmen, tribal leaders and police. Use of the product as currency is a testament to its popularity and its casual tether to daily life. Workers who produce heroin and other drugs, and those who distribute them, are often paid in kind and encouraged to use or sell, Min Sid says.

According to Nang Pann Ei Kham of the Drug Policy Advocacy group in Myanmar, there were 83,000 injection-drug users in the country in 2016. In 2017, Myanmar journalists reported that authorities had seized 4.6 million methamphetamine pills in February in Rakhine's Maungdaw township, near the border of Bangladesh, and 400,000 additional pills that May. The same year, $220©million in opiates and amphetamines were seized and burned by the government for show. The Associated Press took a video.

Two of Min Sid's close friends died heroin-related deaths. His addicted cousin disappeared into the countryside and has been missing for the past three years. Min Sid didn't feel right screaming "cunt authority" while he was lining the authorities' pockets, even as a small-time addict. On top of tragedy and hypocrisy, there were the relentless beatings — though not ones delivered by gangs or other druggies over money or territory. Min Sid's traditional Burmese mother whupped him silly every time she saw him high, including the time she and his father carried him to the hospital, shitting his pants and choking on his own vomit.

"It was hard on my family, so my mom was hard on me," he says, his hand instinctively moving upward to cover the back of his head.

• • •

A few days after the Pirate Bar show, Min Sid and I are walking around diamond-topped Shwedagon Pagoda, his country's most sacred temple. Somehow he's the one who looks like a foreigner — a guy in black sneaking off to smoke cigs, a huge breach of pagoda etiquette, while everyone else is lighting incense, praying and washing the Buddha statues for luck.

"These people forget that Buddha didn't

need anybody else," Min Sid says. "He went his own way, like Johnny Cash."

Many of the families here most likely don't believe that more than half a million people have been forcibly uprooted from the northwestern part of their country, or that the military crackdown on the Rohingya has been called genocide by the UN. The state newspapers, *The Mirror Daily* and *The Global New Light of Myanmar,* don't run photos of the burning Muslim houses in Rakhine's Maungdaw township.

"We trust our government to handle terrorists," one man says between prayers.

Last April, a young Rohingya citizen journalist was my eye inside Maungdaw. He described a black skyline outside his window, caused, he said, by around-the-clock house fires. They stopped burning only if a European dignitary was coming into the Rakhine state, he said. After his third dictated report, the journalist fled to Bangladesh.

That same month, Thingyan, the annual water festival, began under a clear blue sky in Yangon. It was four days of fire hoses soaking the crowds at outdoor concerts. Drunken water fights between cars on gridlocked streets welcomed Myanmar's New Year. Having left Bangladesh a month earlier, I knew that right across the Naf River at Tulabagan, the newest Rohingya refugee encampment, Rohingya families had their jerricans lined up around one dry well, waiting for rain.

Within the Yangon state-media twilight zone, many locals believe the official narrative that the Rohingya have killed one another, set their own houses on fire and displaced themselves en masse in order to gain sympathy from the Western media. Others say the government assault on Rohingya families is a well-deserved retaliation: In August 2017, a group of Rohingya extremists attacked 30 police stations in Rakhine, killing at least a dozen policemen. According to Matthew Wells, a senior crisis advisor with Amnesty International, that same month, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, a Rohingya Muslim extremist group, executed nearly 100 Hindu men, women and children.

The punks look at the military crony government, organised Buddhism and the government education they received with a scepticism that's hard to find elsewhere in Yangon. They're unafraid to scream their doubts onstage or to have sympathy for those ignored by the majority of ethnic Burmese. The punks may be hazy on the nuances of the current Myanmar conflicts, but based on their childhoods spent within an ageing propaganda machine, they suspect the state narrative isn't the full story. A lot of what they've learned in Myanmar just doesn't jibe with the rest of the world, suggests Kyaw Kyaw.

"For example, in Myanmar Hitler is a national hero," he says.

Japanese generals founded the Tatmadaw during World War II, and government education in Myanmar still delivers an Axis version of history. According to a local, world history textbooks for grades eight and 10 make no mention of the Holocaust. Descriptions of Nazism and fascism don't go far beyond "strong" and "unifying." When I approach a university student for a quick man-on-the-street interview, he describes Hitler as a "determined artist who, with hard work, made himself into a world leader." Pop your head into a café and you'll likely glimpse a few Hitler screensavers. If you share a ride with a traveller from Germany, odds are a Yangon taxi driver will give a thumbs-up and say, "Germany good! Hitler good!"

The silence in Yangon crackles. After New Year, an uptick in clashes between the government and Kachin state insurgents displaced 6,000 people. Starving families caught in the crossfire near Hpakant spent the summer hiding in the bush, living on banana stems. Reports from aid agencies in the region read like screams from a distant point in the sea, though Google shows Hpakant to be around a day's drive away.

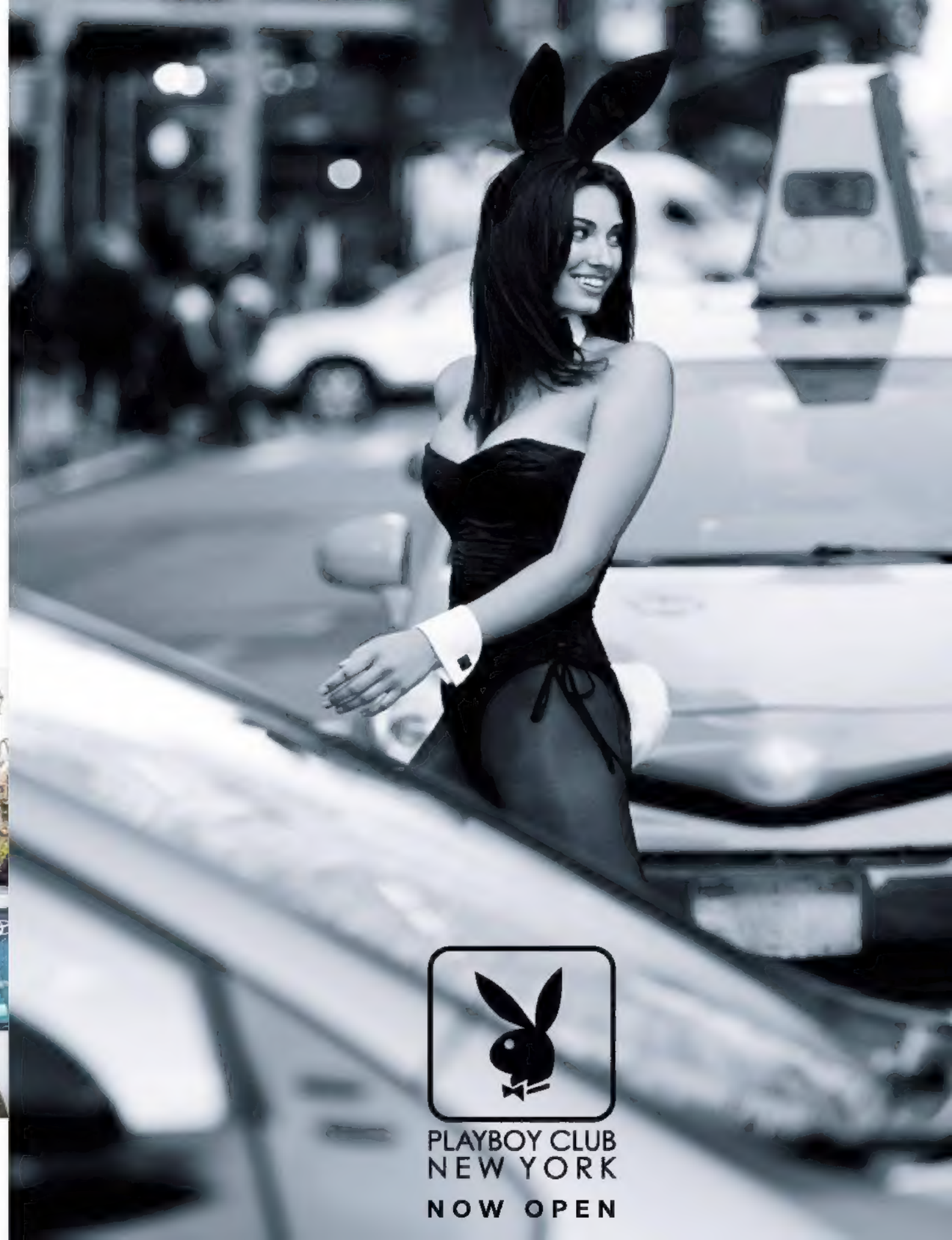
The illusion of Myanmar is as convincing as the ragged sparrow handlers who sit on the curb with their caged birds. For a few kyats, a handler will release a bird into the air, freighted with tourist wishes. But they don't release the birds for long; the cage is their home. The sparrows will return for seeds, to be released and caged again for more money.

"Many things in Myanmar are like this," Kyaw Kyaw says. "It's hard for foreigners to see my people. When we are happy we smile at you. When we are angry we also smile."

At Shwedagon Pagoda, Min Sid and I sing "I've Been Everywhere" and "Folsom Prison Blues" while mantras fill the air around us. It isn't the first time the Man in Black has come up: After the Pirate Bar show, Min Sid stayed drunk for two days, visiting punkrocker friends and playing music. At one point the punks got into a fistfight with some locals from a village on the outskirts of Yangon — "redneck Burmese," he called them. When the police asked for the punks' names, Min Sid slackened his jaw and in a comically deep voice said, "I'm Johnny Cash, and this is Tennessee Two."

Here at the pagoda, every voice connects to the next. The hum bouncing off the ancient inlaid walls and countless ivory statues of the Buddha brings out the vestigial drug tremor in Min Sid's cheek. In that moment, in his weary, tattoo-fringed face, I see what Kyaw Kyaw was talking about: angry, smiling. ■

A traffic jam, Yangon-style, with Shwedagon Pagoda looming over it all.



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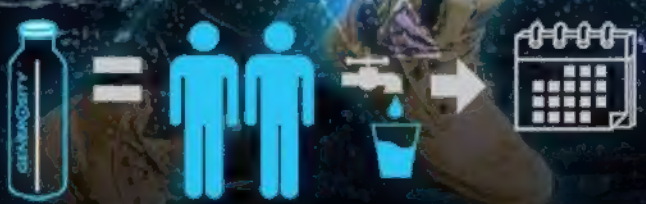

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